GREAT ENGLISH SHORT STORIES

Great
English Short Stories

EDITED BY
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AND
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INTRODUCTION

"TELL us a story!" has been the cry on the lips of Humanity since first it emerged from the dark stage of purely animal existence and entered into the possession of conscious thought. For with the boon of thought—which means imagination, no less—man developed the most universal of all interests—the interest in the doings and mental processes of his fellows.

And from the retailing of what actually *had* happened the step to the telling of what *might* have happened was a short and easy one. Thus fiction was born to a world ever eager to escape from its own mundane realities into the realm of the romantic and the heroic.

The beginning of story-telling—who shall attempt with any accuracy to place or date it?

If the *Book of Genesis* be admitted as a collection, and a very exquisite collection, of folk-lore, then we still remain in dubiety as to the date of its inception in relation to the origins which subsequently found coherent expression in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, or the tangle of hearsay and legend which became crystallised in the form of the Scandinavian *Edda*, or the migratory Teuton's *Beowulf*.

The Saga, in one form or another, has been man's immemorial expression of the tale-weaving instinct, for with this instinct is combined man's perennial urge toward the chronicle embodying those heroic qualities which we all instinctively admire. But the Saga has invariably been expressed in verse, often crude if vigorous, though sometimes imbued with real melody and dignity. Fiction was to cling to this mode of expression for many a decade before it achieved the simple directness of prose.

The bard, the ballad-monger, the strolling *jongleur*, those perambulating custodians of a nation's store of folk-lore and romance, used the rhymed form almost universally. Before the era of the printed page the great traditional stories were handed on from mouth to mouth, from one generation to another. The rhyme-form was chosen very largely as an aid to memorisation, since the mind retained a story in that form with greater ease than the same tale expressed in more mundane prose.

Chaucer, the father of the written tale, used verse, only departing from it occasionally, as in the interpolated *Tale of Melibeus* and *The Parson's Tale*, which, however, were not pieces of original work but adaptations. Likewise the author of *The Friars of Berwick* wrote exclusively in verse. As with the English writers, so those of the Continent expressed their ideas almost exclusively in rhyme.

Malory, the first name of any real significance in the history of English prose, gave us, in the *Morte d'Arthur*, what was, in the main, no more than a brilliant adaptation from a French original, in which language the short story was already deeply rooted. And since adaptations have no place in a volume of this description, Malory, perforce, must go unrepresented.

Barnabe Riche, although a prolific and self-confessed adapter, can claim for at least a certain proportion of his work the additional merit of personal invention. He was, it is to be noted, also one of the first writers to introduce the "human" note into the story. With him is first clearly made manifest the intrusion of purely *lay* interests.

Stories for long ages had been nothing more nor less than thinly disguised "moralities"—as were the early Chester "Miracle" Plays—sermons in the guise of fiction. Their purpose to maintain the tenets of religious belief, communal equity, and domestic probity were as unmistakable as they were sometimes clumsy.

But mankind cannot live by sermonising alone.

Sex is the basis of the continuation of life, and so, in time, recognition of this fact found itself reflected in the story-telling of the nations. "Sex" crept into the "moralities" that the church struggled so sedulously to keep aloof, austere, and remote. That was the beginning of "romance," and once you give its head to "romance," then "morality," in the academic sense, goes by the board!

Thus, by a very simple process of evolution, we came by the "human" story, the "domestic" story, the story based upon the clash and interplay of human passion, still illumined by that "something more" to which it is in all human nature to aspire; that "something more" that lifts the dull, pain-racked world into the realms of colour and of splendour, where the glowing tapestry of idealisation pales the warp and woof of the world of work-a-day to a thing of drab and dreary fustian; a world of the transcendental which, could we but live up to it, would make of life a pageant rather than a penalty.

It is its power to render possible the escape from the disappointments of actuality into the higher realms of aspiration and beatification that has rendered so much of the printed page the thing of priceless worth we gratefully acknowledge it to be. For it is only the prig or the pedant who would deny a healthy predilection for "a happy ending"!

II

A tale which holdeth children from play
And old men from the chimney corner.
—Sir Philip Sidney.

A story, to be worthy of serious attention, must possess first, *substance*, and then, *form*.

Given these two essential qualities, and manner, length, and all the rest of it, are matters of comparatively minor importance. And although it is just possible to interest with substance almost negligibly accoutred in the matter of form—although no substance is of value unless it beats with the pulse of life—to attempt to hold the attention with form entirely devoid of substance is foredoomed to certain failure. You may be as "style"-ish as you please; but unless you have something to say, something really of interest to put on record—then the fluid had best stay undisturbed in your ink-well, and the fair sheet on your desk remain unspoiled. For no matter how magnificently it is done, to carve an orange pip is, in itself, not enough.

In the clearest realisation of these obligations, the English (and let it be said, in anticipation of the usual frenzied protest, that by the use of this term it is intended to cover any writer in the common tongue) have proved themselves second to none in their power of apprehension.

As a race it has always been the habit of the English to abnegate their most sterling qualities, and emphasise with almost poignant relish their alleged deficiencies. They grumble, they pay, they "muddle through," always to an accompaniment of a dirge-like reiteration of their own manifold sins of omission and commission. This, accompanied by an almost pathetic eagerness to laud the virtues of "the other fellow." More, they become almost painfully self-conscious at the suggestion that of certain rather fine attributes they themselves are not totally devoid.

The cry, taken up by the jealous "stranger without the gates," and repeated with parrot monotony and shrillness by the self-constituted elect (for whom there can exist no virtue in anything unless it be of foreign extraction!) thus passes into the simulacrum of a belief. And for so long have we laboured in this atmosphere of intellectual snobbery and misrepresentation that to regard this "belief" with a sense of proportion and without prejudiced judgment calls for a real effort of detachment.

So it is that, when Short Stories are in question, one has been trained automatically to mouth first the names of the great Continentals, de

Maupassant, Chekhov, Turgeniev, Heyse, and Hauff. But it is no derogation of the power and quality of these admitted giants of their art to assert that qualities as great exist no less amongst the writers of this land. It is all very fair and right to be loyal to, and open-minded about, the literary genius of the foreign writer, but the sad thing about too strenuous a loyalty is the disloyalty in which it involves us for other people, and an open mind is very often a singularly empty one!

Stories may roughly be divided into two categories. Of these the first embraces all that we mean by the "home" story, a story dealing with our own land in one of its many facets, and with a certain standardised atmosphere. It may be a quiet tale of little suburban happenings, almost trivial in essence—although of vital significance to the protagonists; it may reflect some aspect of our daily national life with which the majority are unacquainted except by hearsay, but of which the writer, through the exigencies of his special circumstances, is enabled to write with particular authority; it may be a tale of London's mean streets, or of the swarming life of the grim Five Towns or the Black Country of further North; of Dartmoor's thymy spaces, or of the formalised artificiality of Park Lane and Mayfair. Of these we may claim for them that they are indigenous, peculiar to the race.

The other category takes the reader further afield: to the hot skies and spicy odours of the East; Hong-Kong, Shanghai, the dust and aridity of the Sudan, the wind-swept spaces of Canada, the *bund* of some furtive Indian seaport, the malodorous havens of the Levant. Or, nearer home, though hardly less remote, to the brooding coast of North Africa, the grim chaplet which encircles that ever-threatening, illimitable desert; to languid Spain, lazing under the Rock's swart frown; to some half-forgotten corner of ramshackle Portugal, or, nearer still, set in the broad, smiling land of France.

It is in regard to this last-named category that, for variety of subject, for an almost kaleidoscopic range, for colour, vision, all the facilities that come only as the fruit of first-hand knowledge, as a citizen of the most far-flung Empire in the world, the English writer stands alone in his position of supreme advantage.

Behind our scattered armies, in the wake of those ships that make acquaintance with every ripple of the Seven Seas, in the track of the pioneer and the explorer, has followed the man with the pen, observing, registering, and retailing a host of scenes and impressions of which the more indigenous Continental can never hope to glean the actual personal impression essential to their translation into words upon the printed page.

If there exists a defect in the mass of work from Continental pens it is that, inevitably, a vast proportion of it is parochial. But with so many Parish Pumps from which to make selection the English writer is spared the first and most fruitful equation of monotony.

It has been somewhat querulously urged by some critics that the English short story often suffers from too provoking a brevity. But this contention is surely fallacious. You cannot measure the artistic qualities of a work of the imagination with a yard-stick. A Vermeer or a Meissonier has demonstrated that on something less than twenty inches by eighteen a greater impression of life and verisimilitude could be conveyed than a lesser man could transplant to an acre of paint-covered canvas.

It is the same with the writer, for if brevity be the soul of wit, no less does style very largely consist of the art of leaving out. A verity can be prismatic irrespective of its size, and the length of a story is just exactly the length of its own integral interest. If you have anything to say, *really* to say, then length automatically adjusts itself. Short as it may be it will not prove too short: long as it may be it will not prove too long—as George Bernard Shaw has demonstrated beyond question in the even more difficult medium of the theatre. If you have nothing to say—then an exclamation mark is far too long!

Of humour—that kindlier brother of satire—the English have long proved themselves to be masters. Less acid and cynical than in the case of some of the Continental craftsmen—since a robust, tolerant good-humour has always been a characteristic of the race—for all that English humour does not lack an occasional exemplar of the more mordant, reflective style of comic writing. And if irony be in question, the name of William Makepeace Thackeray alone stands as a guarantee of full measure, pressed down and running over.

The variety and richness of type of a maritime as well as a commercial, industrial, and agricultural race has provided, and will continue to provide, the English humorous writer with an inexhaustible gallery from which to pick and choose; and while the Cockney remains with us there exists an especial field that no other country can hope to parallel, a field of a rich and fruity savour, a kindly and wholesome philosophy, as unique as it is native to the soil.

III

For the rest, the endeavour of the Editors of this volume has been twofold. In the first place, it has been their desire to provide interesting reading; in the second, to demonstrate to some extent the development of the short story, and to show it as it was during the various periods of that development.

Included in this book will be found, therefore, several short stories that can substantiate no claim to the description "great," but to which a place has been yielded rather on the score of their historical reflection. This aspect of them is their sole excuse for their intrusion.

In conclusion, the Editors feel it only right to state that they have been faced with an implacable determination on the part of a few authors to deny the inclusion of specimens of their work in any collection of representative stories, however brave the company by which they might find themselves surrounded. This sustained reluctance it has been found quite impossible to dissolve, neither pelf nor pleading being of the very least avail. So while no one can regret more forcibly than those responsible for this book the omission of one or two "great names"—their identity will occur at once to the most casual reader—the onus for their non-inclusion rests, not with the Editors, who have strained every endeavour to secure their incorporation, but with the reluctant authors themselves.

To the more amenable—an enheartening majority—our thanks are, therefore, doubly due.

GREAT ENGLISH SHORT STORIES

BARNABE RICHE

(*c.*1540–*c.*1620)

BARNABE RICHE was of gentle birth, and distantly connected with the family of Lord Chancellor Rich (1496?–1567). He became a soldier, and saw active service in Queen Mary's war with France in 1557–8; in the Low Countries in the early years of Elizabeth's reign; and, later, in Ireland. He rose to the rank of captain. From 1574 to the end of his life he wrote assiduously, and produced numerous romances in the style of *Euphues* of John Lyly (1554?–1606) and pamphlets attacking the vices of the day.

"Of Apolonius and Silla" is taken from *Riche his Farewell to the Military Profession*, which was published in 1581. The spelling has here been modernised. From this story Shakespeare drew the plot of *Twelfth Night.*

OF APOLONIUS AND SILLA

THERE is no child that is born into this wretched world, but before it doth suck the mother's milk, it taketh first a sup of the cup of error, which maketh us, when we come to riper years, not only to enter into actions of injury, but many times to stray from that is right and reason; but in all other things, wherein we show ourselves to be most drunken with this poisoned cup, it is in our actions of love; for the lover is so estranged from that is right, and wandereth so wide from the bounds of reason, that he is not able to deem white from black, good from bad, virtue from vice; but only led by the appetite of his own affections, and grounding them on the foolishness of his own fancies, will so settle his liking on such a one, as either by desert or unworthiness will merit rather to be loathed than loved.

If a question might be asked, what is the ground in deed of reasonable love, whereby the knot is knit of true and perfect friendship, I think those that be wise would answer—desert: that is, where the party beloved doth requite us with the like; for otherwise, if the bare show of beauty, or the comeliness of personage might be sufficient to confirm us in our love, those that be accustomed to go to fairs and markets might sometimes fall in love with twenty in a day; desert must then be (of force) the ground of reasonable love; for to love them that hate us, to follow them that fly from us, to fawn on them that frown on us, to curry favour with them that disdain us, to be glad to please them that care not how they offend us, who will not confess this to be an erroneous love, neither grounded upon wit nor reason? Wherefore, right courteous gentlewomen, if it please you with patience to peruse this history following, you shall see Dame Error so play her part with a leash of lovers, a male and two females, as shall work a wonder to your wise judgment, in noting the effect of their amorous devices, and conclusions of their actions: the first neglecting the love of a noble dame, young, beautiful, and fair, who only for his goodwill played the part of a servingman, contended to abide any manner of pain only to behold him: he again setting his love of a dame, that despising him (being a noble Duke) gave herself to a servingman (as she had thought); but it otherwise fell out, as the substance of this tale shall better describe. And because I have been something tedious in my first discourse, offending your patient ears with the hearing of a circumstance overlong, from henceforth, that which I mind to write shall be done with such celerity, as the matter that I pretend to pen may in any wise permit me, and thus followeth the history.

During the time that the famous city of Constantinople remained in the hands of Christians, amongst many other noble men that kept their abiding in that flourishing city, there was one whose name was Apolonius, a worthy Duke, who being but a very young man, and even then new come to his possessions, which were very great, levied a mighty band of men at his own proper charges, with whom he served against the Turk during the space of one whole year: in which time, although it were very short, this young Duke so behaved himself, as well by prowess and valiance showed with his own hands, as otherwise by his wisdom and liberality used towards his soldiers, that all his world was filled with the fame of this noble Duke. When he had thus spent one year's service, he caused his trumpet to sound a retreat, and gathering his company together, and embarking themselves, he set sail, holding his course towards Constantinople: but, being upon the sea, by the extremity of a tempest which suddenly fell, his fleet was dissevered, some one way, and some another; but he himself recovered the Isle of Cyprus, where he was worthily received by Pontus, Duke and governor of the same isle, with whom he lodged while his ships were new repairing.

This Pontus, that was lord and governor of this famous isle, was an ancient Duke, and had two children, a son and a daughter: his son was named Silvio, of whom hereafter we shall have further occasion to speak; but at this instant he was in the parts of Africa, serving in the wars.

The daughter's name was Silla, whose beauty was so peerless, that she had the sovereignty amongst all other dames, as well for her beauty as for the nobleness of her birth. This Silla, having heard of the worthiness of Apolonius, this young Duke, who besides his beauty and good graces had a certain natural allurement, that being now in his company in her father's court, she was so strangely attached with the love of Apolonius, that there was nothing might content her but his presence and sweet sight; and although she saw no manner of hope to attain to that she most desired, knowing Apolonius to be but a guest, and ready to take the benefit of the next wind, and to depart into a strange country, whereby she was bereaved of all possibility ever to see him again, and therefore strove with herself to leave her fondness, but all in vain; it would not be, but, like the fowl which is once limed, the more she striveth, the faster she tieth herself. So Silla was now constrained, perforce her will, to yield to love, wherefore, from time to time, she used so great familiarity with him as her honour might well permit, and fed him with such amorous baits as the modesty of a maid could reasonably afford; which when she perceived did take but small effect, feeling herself so much outraged with the extremity of her passion, by the only countenance that she bestowed upon Apolonius, it might have been well perceived that the very eyes pleaded unto him for pity and remorse. But Apolonius, coming but lately from out the field from the chasing of his enemies, and his fury not yet thoroughly dissolved, nor purged from his stomach, gave no regard to those amorous enticements, which by reason of his youth, he had not been acquainted withal. But his mind ran more to hear his pilots bring news of a merry wind to serve his turn to Constantinople, which in the end came very prosperously; and giving Duke Pontus hearty thanks for his great entertainment, taking his leave of himself and the Lady Silla, his daughter, departed with his company, and with a happy gale arrived at his desired port. Gentlewomen, according to my promise, I will here, for brevity's sake, omit to make repetition of the long and dolorous discourse recorded by Silla for this sudden departure of her Apolonius, knowing you to be as tenderly hearted as Silla herself, whereby you may the better conjecture the fury of her fever. But Silla, the further that she saw herself bereaved of all hope ever any more to see her beloved Apolonius, so much the more contagious were her passions, and made the greater speed to execute that she had premeditated in her mind, which was this. Amongst many servants that did attend upon her, there was one whose name was Pedro, who had a long time waited upon her in her chamber, whereby she was well assured of his fidelity and trust: to that Pedro therefore she betrayed first the fervency of her love borne to Apolonius, conjuring him in the name of the goddess of love herself, and binding him by the duty that a servant ought to have, that tendereth his mistress safety and good liking, and desiring him, with tears trickling down her cheeks, that he would give his consent to aid and assist her in that she had determined, which was for that she was fully resolved to go to Constantinople, where she might again take the view of her beloved Apolonius, that he, according to the trust she had reposed in him, would not refuse to give his consent, secretly to convey her from out her father's court, according as she should give him direction, and also to make himself partaker of her journey, and to wait upon her till she had seen the end of her determination.

Pedro, perceiving with what vehemence his lady and mistress had made request unto him, albeit he saw many perils and doubts depending in her pretence, notwithstanding, gave his consent to be at her disposition, promising her to further her with his best advice, and to be ready to obey whatsoever she would please to command him. The match being thus agreed upon, and all things prepared in a readiness for their departure, it happened there was a galley of Constantinople ready to depart, which Pedro understanding, came to the captain, desiring him to have passage for himself and for a poor maid that was his sister, which were bound to Constantinople upon certain urgent affairs: to which request the captain granted, willing him to prepare aboard with all speed, because the wind served him presently to depart.

Pedro now coming to his mistress, and telling her how he had handled the matter with the captain, she liking very well of the device, disguising herself into very simple attire, stole away from out her father's court, and came with Pedro, whom now she calleth brother, aboard the galley, where all things being in readiness, and the wind serving very well, they launched forth with their oars, and set sail. When they were at the sea, the captain of the galley, taking the view of Silla, perceiving her singular beauty, he was better pleased in beholding of her face than in taking the height either of the sun or star, and thinking her, by the homeliness of her apparel, to be but some simple maiden, calling her into his cabin, he began to break with her, after the sea fashion, desiring her to use his own cabin for her better ease, and during the time that she remained at the sea, she should not want a bed; and then, whispering softly in her ear, he said, that, for want of a bedfellow, he himself would supply that room. Silla, not being acquainted with any such talk, blushed for shame, but made him no answer at all. My captain, feeling such a bickering within himself, the like whereof he had never endured upon the sea, was like to be taken prisoner aboard his own ship, and forced to yield himself a captive without any cannon shot; wherefore, to salve all sores, and thinking it the readiest way to speed, he began to break with Silla in the way of marriage, telling her how happy a voyage she had made, to fall into the liking of such a one as himself was, who was able to keep and maintain her like a gentlewoman, and for her sake would likewise take her brother into his fellowship, whom he would by some means prefer in such sort, that both of them should have good cause to think themselves thrice happy, she to light of such a husband, and he to light of such a brother. But Silla, nothing pleased with these preferments, desired him to cease his talk, for that she did think herself indeed to be too unworthy such a one as he was, neither was she minded yet to marry, and therefore desired him to fix his fancy upon some that were better worthy than herself was, and that could better like of his courtesy than she could do. The captain, seeing himself thus refused, being in a great chafe, he said as followeth:

Then, seeing you make so little account of my courtesy, proffered to one that is so far unworthy of it, from henceforth I will use the office of my authority: you shall know that I am the captain of this ship, and have power to command and dispose of things at my pleasure; and seeing you have so scornfully rejected me to be your loyal husband, I will now take you by force, and use you at my will, and so long as it shall please me will keep you for mine own store; there shall be no man able to defend you, nor yet to persuade me from that I have determined.

Silla, with these words being struck into a great fear, did think it now too late to rue her rash attempt, determined rather to die with her own hands, than to suffer herself to be abused in such sort; therefore, she most humbly desired the captain, so much as he could, to save her credit, and seeing that she must needs be at his will and disposition, that for that present he would depart, and suffer till night, when in the dark he might take his pleasure, without any manner of suspicion to the residue of his company. The captain, thinking now the goal to be more than half won, was contented so far to satisfy her request, and departed out, leaving her alone in his cabin.

Silla, being alone by herself, drew out her knife, ready to strike herself to the heart, and, falling upon her knees, desired God to receive her soul, as an acceptable sacrifice for her follies, which she had so wilfully committed, craving pardon for her sins and so forth, continuing a long and pitiful reconciliation to God, in the midst whereof there suddenly fell a wonderful storm, the terror whereof was such, that there was no man but did think the seas would presently have swallowed them: the billows so suddenly arose with the rage of the wind, that they were all glad to fall to heaving out of water, for otherwise their feeble galley had never been able to have brooked the seas. This storm continued all that day and the next night; and they being driven to roam before the wind, to keep the galley ahead the billow, were driven upon the main shore where the galley brake all to pieces: there was every man providing to save his own life; some got upon hatches, boards, and casks, and were driven with the waves to and fro; but the greatest number were drowned, amongst the which Pedro was one; but Silla herself being in the cabin, as you have heard, took hold of a chest that was the captain's, the which, by the only providence of God, brought her safe to the shore, the which when she had recovered, not knowing what was become of Pedro her man, she deemed that both he and all the rest had been drowned, for that she saw no body upon the shore but herself. Wherefore, when she had a while made great lamentations, complaining her mishaps, she began in the end to comfort herself with the hope that she had to see her Apolonius, and found such means that she brake open the chest that brought her to land wherein she found good store of coin, and sundry suits of apparel that were the captain's. And now, to prevent a number of injuries that might be proffered to a woman that was left in her case, she determined to leave her own apparel, and to sort herself into some of those suits, that, being taken for a man, she might pass through the country in the better safety: and, as she changed her apparel, she thought it likewise convenient to change her name; wherefore, not readily happening of any other, she called herself Silvio, by the name of her own brother, whom you have heard spoken of before.

In this manner she travelled to Constantinople, where she inquired out the palace of the Duke Apolonius; and thinking herself now to be both fit and able to play the serving-man, she presented herself to the Duke, craving his service. The Duke, very willing to give succour unto strangers, perceiving him to be a proper young man, gave him entertainment. Silla thought herself now more than satisfied for all the casualties that had happened unto her in her journey, that she might at her pleasure take but the view of the Duke Apolonius, and above the rest of his servants was very diligent and attendant upon him; the which the Duke perceiving began likewise to grow into good liking with the diligence of his man, and therefore made him one of his chamber. Who but Silvio then was most near about him, in helping of him to make him ready in a morning, in the setting of his ruffs, in the keeping of his chamber? Silvio pleased his master so well, that above all the rest of his servants about him he had the greatest credit, and the Duke put him most in trust.

At this very instant there was remaining in the city a noble dame, a widow, whose husband was but lately deceased, one of the noblest men that were in the parts of Greece, who left his lady and wife large possessions and great livings. This lady's name was called Julina, who besides the abundance of her wealth and the greatness of her revenues, had likewise the sovereignty of all the dames of Constantinople for her beauty. To this Lady Julina Apolonius became an earnest suitor; and, according to the manner of wooers, besides fair words, sorrowful sighs, and piteous countenances, there must be sending of loving letters, chains, bracelets, brooches, rings, tablets, gems, jewels, and presents, I know not what. So my Duke, who in the time that he remained in the Isle of Cyprus, had no skill at all in the art of love, although it were more than half proffered unto him, was now become a scholar in love's school, and had already learned his first lesson; that is, to speak pitifully, to look ruthfully, to promise largely, to serve diligently, and to please carefully: now he was learning his second lesson; that is, to reward liberally, to give bountifully, to present willingly, and to write lovingly. Thus Apolonius was so busied in his new study, that I warrant you there was no man that could challenge him for playing the truant, he followed his profession with so good a will: and who must be the messenger to carry the tokens and love-letters to the Lady Julina, but Silvio, his man; in him the Duke reposed his only confidence to go between him and his lady.

Now, gentlewomen, do you think there could have been a greater torment devised, wherewith to afflict the heart of Silla, than herself to be made the instrument to work her own mishap, and to play the attorney in a cause that made so much against herself? But Silla, altogether desirous to please her master, cared nothing at all to offend herself, followed his business with so good a will, as if it had been in her own preferment.

Julina, now having many times taken the gaze of this young youth, Silvio, perceiving him to be of such excellent perfect grace, was so entangled with the often sight of this sweet temptation, that she fell into as great a liking with the man as the master was with herself; and on a time, Silvio being sent from his master with a message to the Lady Julina, as he began very earnestly to solicit in his master's behalf, Julina, interrupting him in his tale, said: "Silvio, it is enough that you have said for your master; from henceforth, either speak for yourself, or say nothing at all." Silla, abashed to hear these words, began in her mind to accuse the blindness of Love, that Julina, neglecting the goodwill of so noble a Duke, would prefer her love unto such a one, as nature itself had denied to recompense her liking.

And now, for a time leaving matters depending as you have heard, it fell out that the right Silvio indeed (whom you have heard spoken of before, the brother of Silla) was come to his father's court into the Isle of Cyprus; where, understanding that his sister was departed in manner as you have heard, conjectured that the very occasion did proceed of some liking had between Pedro her man (that was missing with her) and herself: but Silvio, who loved his sister as dearly as his own life, and the rather for that, as she was his natural sister, both by father and mother, so the one of them was so like the other in countenance and favour, that there was no man able to discern the one from the other by their faces, saving by their apparel, the one being a man, the other a woman.

Silvio, therefore, vowed to his father, not only to seek out his sister Silla, but also to revenge the villainy which he conceived in Pedro for the carrying away of his sister; and thus departing, having travelled through many cities and towns, without hearing any manner of news of those he went to seek for, at the last he arrived at Constantinople, where as he was walking in an evening for his own recreation, on a pleasant green yard, without the walls of the city, he fortuned to meet with the Lady Julina, who likewise had been abroad to take the air; and as she suddenly cast her eyes upon Silvio, thinking him to be her old acquaintance by reason they were so like one another, as you have heard before, said unto him, "Sir Silvio, if your haste be not the greater, I pray you, let me have a little talk with you, seeing I have so luckily met you in this place."

Silvio, wondering to hear himself so rightly named, being but a stranger, not of above two days' continuance in the city, very courteously came towards her, desirous to hear what she would say.

Julina, commanding her train something to stand back, said as followeth: "Seeing my goodwill and friendly love hath been the only cause to make me so prodigal to offer that I see is so lightly rejected, it maketh me to think that men be of this condition, rather to desire those things which they cannot come by, than to esteem or value of that which both largely and liberally is offered unto them: but if the liberality of my proffer hath made to seem less the value of the thing that I meant to present, it is but in your own conceit, considering how many noble men there hath been here before, and be yet at this present, which hath both served, sued, and most humbly entreated, to attain to that, which to you of myself I have freely offered, and I perceive is despised, or at the least very lightly regarded."

Silvio, wondering at these words, but more amazed that she could so rightly call him by his name, could not tell what to make of her speeches, assuring himself that she was deceived and did mistake him, did think, notwithstanding, it had been a point of great simplicity, if he should forsake that which Fortune had so favourably proffered unto him, perceiving by her train that she was some lady of great honour, and viewing the perfection of her beauty and the excellence of her grace and countenance, did think it impossible that she should be despised, and therefore answered thus:

"Madam, if before this time I have seemed to forget myself, in neglecting your courtesy which so liberally you have meant unto me, please it you to pardon what is past, and from this day forward Silvio remaineth ready pressed to make such reasonable amends as his ability may anyway permit, or as it shall please you to command."

Julina, the gladdest woman that might be to hear these joyful news, said: "Then, my Silvio, see you fail not to-morrow at night to sup with me at my own house, where I will discourse farther with you what amends you shall make me": to which request Silvio gave his glad consent, and thus they departed, very well pleased. And as Julina did think the time very long till she had reaped the fruit of her desire, so Silvio wished for harvest before corn could grow, thinking the time as long till he saw how matters would fall out; but, not knowing what lady she might be, he presently (before Julina was out of sight) demanded of one that was walking by, what she was, and how she was called? who satisfied Silvio in every point, and also in what part of the town her house did stand, whereby he might inquire it out.

Silvio, thus departing to his lodging, passed the night with very unquiet sleep, and the next morning his mind ran so much of his supper, that he never cared neither for his breakfast nor dinner; and the day, to his seeming, passed away so slowly, that he had thought the stately steeds had been tired that draw the chariot of the sun, or else some other Joshua had commanded them again to stand, and wished that Phaethon had been there with a whip.

Julina, on the other side, had thought the clock setter had played the knave, the day came no faster forward: but six o'clock being once struck, recovered comfort to both parties; and Silvio, hastening himself to the palace of Julina where by her he was friendly welcomed, and a sumptuous supper being made ready, furnished with sundry sorts of delicate dishes, they sat them down, harrying the supper time with amorous looks, loving countenances, and secret glances conveyed from the one to the other, which did better satisfy them than the feeding of their dainty dishes.

Supper time being thus spent, Julina did think it very unfitting if she should turn Silvio to go seek his lodging in an evening, desired him therefore that he would take a bed in her house for that night; and, bringing him up into a fair chamber that was very richly furnished, she found such means, that when all the rest of her household servants were abed and quiet, she came herself to bear Silvio company, where, concluding upon conditions that were in question between them, they passed the night with such joy and contentment as might in that convenient time be wished for. But only that Julina, feeding too much of some one dish above the rest, received a surfeit, whereof she could not be cured in forty weeks after, a natural inclination in all women which are subject to longing, and want the reason to use a moderation in their diet; but the morning approaching, Julina took her leave, and conveyed herself into her own chamber; and when it was fair daylight, Silvio, making himself ready, departed likewise about his affairs in the town, debating with himself how things had happened, being well assured that Julina had mistaken him; and, therefore, for fear of further evils, determined to come no more there, but took his journey towards other places in the parts of Greece, to see if he could learn any tidings of his sister Silla.

The Duke of Apolonius, having made a long suit and never a whit the nearer of his purpose, came to Julina to crave her direct answer, either to accept of him and of such conditions as he proffered unto her, or else to give him his last farewell.

Julina, as you have heard, had taken an earnest penny of another, whom she had thought had been Silvio, the Duke's man, was at a controversy in herself what she might do: one while she thought, seeing her occasion served so fit, to crave the Duke's goodwill, for the marrying of his man; then again, she could not tell what displeasure the Duke would conceive, in that she should seem to prefer his man before himself, did think it therefore best to conceal the matter, till she might speak with Silvio, to use his opinion how these matters should be handled: and hereupon resolving herself, desiring the Duke to pardon her speeches, said as followeth:

"Sir Duke, for that from this time forward I am no longer of myself, having given my full power and authority over to another, whose wife I now remain by faithful vow and promise: and albeit I know the world will wonder when they shall understand the fondness of my choice, yet I trust you yourself will nothing dislike me, sith I have meant no other thing than the satisfying of mine own contentment and liking."

The Duke, hearing these words, answered: "Madam, I must then content myself, although against my will, having the law in your own hands to like of whom you list, and to make choice where it pleaseth you."

Julina, giving the Duke great thanks, that would content himself with such patience, desired him likewise to give his free consent, and goodwill to the party whom she had chosen to be her husband.

"Nay, surely, madam," quoth the Duke, "I will never give my consent that any other man shall enjoy you than myself: I have made too great account of you, than so lightly to pass you away with my goodwill. But seeing it lieth not in me to let you, having (as you say) made your own choice, so from henceforwards I leave you to your own liking, always willing you well, and thus will take my leave."

The Duke departed towards his own house, very sorrowful that Julina had thus served him: but in the mean space that the Duke had remained in the house of Julina, some of her servants fell into talk and conference with the servants of Julina; where, debating between them of the likelihood of the marriage between the Duke and the lady, one of the servants of Julina said, that he never saw his lady and mistress use so good countenance to the Duke himself, as she had done to Silvio his man; and began to report with what familiarity and courtesy she had received him, feasted him, and lodged him, and that, in his opinion, Silvio was like to speed before the Duke, or any other that were suitors.

This tale was quickly brought to the Duke himself, who, making better inquiry in the matter, found it to be true that was reported; and, better considering of the words which Julina had used towards himself, was very well assured that it could be no other than his own man, that had thrust his nose so far out of joint; wherefore, without any further respect, caused him to be thrust into a dungeon, where he was kept prisoner in a very pitiful plight.

Poor Silvio, having got intelligence by some of his fellows what was the cause that the Duke his master did bear such displeasure unto him, devised all the means he could, as well by mediation by his fellows, as otherwise by petitions and supplications, to the Duke, that he would suspend his judgment till perfect proof were had in the matter, and then, if any manner of thing did fall out against him, whereby the Duke had cause to take any grief, he would confess himself worthy not only of imprisonment, but also of most vile and shameful death. With these petitions he daily plied the Duke, but all in vain; for the Duke thought he had made so good proof, that he was thoroughly confirmed in his opinion against his man.

But the Lady Julina, wondering what made Silvio that he was so slack in his visitation, and why he absented himself so long from her presence, began to think that all was not well; but in the end, perceiving no decoction of her former surfeit, received as you have heard, and finding in herself an unwonted swelling in her belly, assuring herself to be with child, fearing to become quite bankrupt of her honour, did think it more than time to seek out a father, and made such secret search and diligent inquiry, that she learned the truth how Silvio was kept in prison by the Duke his master; and minding to find a present remedy, as well for the love she bore to Silvio, as for the maintenance of her credit and estimation, she speedily hasted to the palace of the Duke, to whom she said as followeth:

"Sir Duke, it may be that you will think my coming to your house in this sort doth something pass the limits of modesty, the which I protest, before God, proceedeth of this desire, that the world should know how justly I seek means to maintain my honour. But to the end I seem not tedious with prolixity of words, nor to use other than direct circumstances, know, sir, that the love I bear to my only beloved Silvio, whom I do esteem more than all the jewels in the world, whose personage I regard more than my own life, is the only cause of my attempted journey, beseeching you, that all the whole displeasure, which I understand you have conceived against him, may be imputed unto my charge, and that it would please you lovingly to deal with him, whom of myself I have chosen, rather for the satisfaction of mine honest liking, than for the vain pre-eminences or honourable dignities looked after by ambitious minds."

The Duke, having heard this discourse, caused Silvio presently to be sent for, and to be brought before him, to whom he said: "Had it not been sufficient for thee, when I had reposed myself in thy fidelity and the trustiness of thy service, that thou shouldst so traitorously deal with me, but since that time hast not spared still to abuse me with so many forgeries and perjured protestations, not only hateful unto me, whose simplicity thou thinkest to be such, that by the plot of thy pleasant tongue thou wouldst make me believe a manifest untruth; but most abominable be thy doing in the presence and sight of God, that hast not spared to blaspheme His holy name by calling Him to be a witness to maintain thy leasings, and so detestably wouldst forswear thyself in a matter that is so openly known."

Poor Silvio, whose innocency was such that he might lawfully swear, seeing Julina to be there in place, answered thus:

"Most noble Duke, well understanding your conceived grief, most humbly I beseech you patiently to hear my excuse, not minding thereby to aggravate or heap up your wrath and displeasure, protesting, before God, that there is nothing in the world which I regard so much, or do esteem so dear, as your good grace and favour; but desirous that your grace should know my innocency, and to clear myself of such impositions, wherewith I know I am wrongfully accused, which, as I understand, should be in the practising of the Lady Julina, who standeth here in place whose acquittance for my better discharge now I most humbly crave, protesting, before the Almighty God, that neither in thought, word, nor deed, I have not otherwise used myself than according to the bond and duty of a servant, that is both willing and desirous to further his master's suits; which if I have otherwise said than that is true, you, Madame Julina, who can very well decide the depths of all this doubt, I most humbly beseech you to certify a truth, if I have in anything said amiss, or have otherwise spoken than is right and just."

Julina, having heard this discourse which Silvio had made, perceiving that he stood in great awe of the Duke's displeasure, answered thus: "Think not, my Silvio, that my coming hither is to accuse you of any misdemeanour towards your master, so I do not deny but in all such embassies wherein towards me you have been employed, you have used the office of a faithful and trusty messenger, neither am I ashamed to confess, that the first day that mine eyes did behold the singular behaviour, the notable courtesy, and other innumerable gifts wherewith my Silvio is endued, but that beyond all measure my heart was so inflamed, that impossible it was for me to quench the fervent love, or extinguish the least part of my conceived torment, before I had betrayed the same unto him, and of my own motion craved his promised faith and loyalty of marriage; and now is the time to manifest the same unto the world which hath been done before God and between ourselves, knowing that it is not needful to any person. Therefore (as I said before) Silvio is my husband by plighted faith, whom I hope to obtain without offence or displeasure of anyone, trusting that there is no man that will so far forget himself as to restrain that which God hath left at liberty for every wight, or that will seek by cruelty to force ladies to marry, otherwise than according to their own liking. Fear not then, my Silvio, to keep your faith and promise which you have made unto me; and as for the rest, I doubt not things will so fall out as you shall have no manner of cause to complain."

Silvio, amazed to hear these words, for that Julina by her speech seemed to confirm that which he most of all desired to be quit of, said: "Who would have thought that a lady of so great honour and reputation would herself be the ambassador of a thing so prejudicial and uncomely for her estate! What plighted promises be these which be spoken of? altogether ignorant unto me, which if it be otherwise than I have said, you sacred goddess consume me straight with flashing flames of fire. But what words might I use to give credit to the truth and innocency of my cause? Ah, Madam Julina! I desire no other testimony than your own, I desire no other testimony than your own honesty and virtue, thinking that you will not so much blemish the brightness of your honour, knowing that a woman is, or should be, the image of courtesy, continency, and shamefastness, from the which so soon as she stoopeth, and leaveth the office of her duty and modesty, besides the degradation of her honour, she thrusteth herself into the pit of perpetual infamy. And as I can not think you would so far forget yourself by the refusal of a noble Duke, to dim the light of your renown and glory, which hitherto you have maintained amongst the best and noblest ladies, by such a one as I know myself to be, too far unworthy your degree and calling, so most humbly I beseech you to confess a truth, whereto tendeth those vows and promises you speak of, which speeches be so obscure unto me, as I know not for my life how I might understand them."

Julina, something nipped with these speeches, said: "And what is the matter, that now you make so little account of your Julina? that, being my husband in deed, have the face to deny me, to whom thou art contracted by so many solemn oaths? What! art thou ashamed to have me to thy wife? How much oughtest thou rather to be ashamed to break thy promised faith, and to have despised the holy and dreadful name of God? but that time constraineth me to lay open that which shame rather willeth I should dissemble and keep secret, behold me then here, Silvio, whom thou hast gotten with child; who, if thou be of such honesty, as I trust for all this I shall find, then the thing is done without prejudice, or any hurt to my conscience, considering that by the professed faith thou didst account me for thy wife, and I received thee for my spouse and loyal husband, swearing by the Almighty God that no other than you have made the conquest and triumph of my chastity, whereof I crave no other witness than yourself and mine own conscience."

I pray you, gentlewomen, was not this a foul oversight of Julina, that would so precisely swear so great an oath that she was gotten with child by one that was altogether unfurnished with implements for such a turn? For God's love, take heed, and let this be an example to you, when you be with child, how you swear who is the father before you have had good proof and knowledge of the party; for men be so subtle and full of sleight, that, God knoweth, a woman may quickly be deceived.

But now to return to our Silvio, who, hearing an oath sworn so divinely that he had gotten a woman with child, was like to believe that it had been true in very deed; but remembering his own impediment, thought it impossible that he should commit such an act, and therefore, half in a chafe, he said: "What law is able to restrain the foolish indiscretion of a woman that yieldeth herself to her own desires? what shame is able to bridle or withdraw her from her mind and madness, or with what snaffle is it possible to hold her back from the execution of her filthiness? but what abomination is this, that a lady of such a house should so forget the greatness of her estate, the alliance whereof she is descended, the nobility of her deceased husband, and maketh no conscience to shame and slander herself with such a one as I am, being so far unfit and unseemly for her degree! but now horrible is it to hear the name of God so defaced, that we make no more account but for the maintenance of our mischief, we fear no whit at all to forswear His holy name, as though He were not in all His dealings most righteous, true, and just, and will not only lay open our leasings to the world, but will likewise punish the same with most sharp and bitter scourges."

Julina, not able to endure him to proceed any farther in his sermon, was already surprised with a vehement grief, began bitterly to cry out, uttering these speeches following:

"Alas! is it possible that the sovereign justice of God can abide a mischief so great and cursed? why may I not now suffer death, rather than the infamy which I see to wander before mine eyes? Oh, happy, and more than right happy, had I been, if inconstant fortune had not devised this treason, wherein I am surprised and caught! Am I thus become to be entangled with snares, and in the hands of him, who, enjoying the spoils of my honour, will openly deprive me of my fame, by making me a common fable to all posterity in time to come? Ah, traitor, and discourteous wretch! is this the recompense of the honest and firm amity which I have borne thee? wherein have I deserved this discourtesy? by loving thee more than thou art able to deserve? Is it I, arrant thief! is it I, upon whom thou thinkest to work thy mischiefs? dost thou think me no better worth, but that thou mayest prodigally waste my honour at thy pleasure? didst thou dare to adventure upon me, having thy conscience wounded with so deadly a reason? Ah, unhappy, and, above all other, most unhappy! that have so charily preserved mine honour, and now am made a prey to satisfy a young man's lust, that hath coveted nothing but the spoil of my chastity and good name."

Here withal her tears so gushed down her cheeks, that she was not able to open her mouth to use any farther speech.

The Duke, who stood by all this while and heard this whole discourse, was wonderfully moved with compassion towards Julina, knowing that from her infancy she had ever so honourably used herself, that there was no man able to detect her of any misdemeanour, otherwise than beseemed a lady of her estate: wherefore, being fully resolved that Silvio, his man, had committed this villainy against her, in a great fury, drawing his rapier, he said unto Silvio:

"How canst thou, arrant thief! show thyself so cruel and careless to such as do thee honour? Hast thou so little regard of such a noble lady, as humbleth herself to such a villain as thou art, who, without any respect either of her renown or noble estate, canst be content to seek the wreck and utter ruin of her honour? But frame thyself to make such satisfaction as she requireth, although I know, unworthy wretch, that thou art not able to make her the least part of amends, or I swear by God that thou shalt not escape the death which I will minister to thee with my own hands, and therefore advise thee well what thou doest."

Silvio, having heard this sharp sentence, fell down on his knees before the Duke, craving for mercy, desiring that he might be suffered to speak with the Lady Julina apart, promising to satisfy her according to her own contentment.

"Well," quoth the Duke, "I take thy word; and therewithal I advise thee that thou perform thy promise, or otherwise I protest, before God, I will make thee such an example to the world, that all traitors shall tremble for fear how they do seek the dishonouring of ladies."

But now Julina had conceived so great grief against Silvio, that there was much ado to persuade her to talk with him; but remembering her own case, desirous to hear what excuse he could make, in the end she agreed, and being brought into a place severally by themselves, Silvio began with a piteous voice to say as followeth:

"I know not, madam, of whom I might make complaint, whether of you or of myself, or rather of Fortune, which hath conducted and brought us both into so great adversity. I see that you receive great wrong, and I am condemned against all right; you in peril to abide the bruit of spiteful tongues, and I in danger to lose the thing that I most desire; and although I could allege many reasons to prove my sayings true, yet I refer myself to the experience and bounty of your mind." And here withal loosing his garments down to his stomach, and showed Julina his breasts and pretty teats, surmounting far the whiteness of snow itself, saying: "Lo, madam! behold here the party whom you have challenged to be the father of your child. See, I am a woman, the daughter of a noble Duke, who, only for the love of him whom you so lightly have shaken off, have forsaken my father, abandoned my country, and, in manner as you see, am become a servingman, satisfying myself but with the only sight of my Apolonius. And now, madam, if my passion were not vehement, and my torments without comparison, I would wish that my feigned griefs might be laughed to scorn, and my dissembled pains to be rewarded with flouts: but my love being pure, my travail continual, and my griefs endless, I trust, madam, you will not only excuse me of crime, but also pity my distress, the which, I protest, I would still have kept secret, if my fortune would so have permitted."

Julina did now think herself to be in a worse case than ever she was before, for now she knew not whom to challenge to be the father of her child; wherefore, when she had told the Duke the very certainty of the discourse which Silvio had made unto her, she departed to her own house, with such grief and sorrow, that she purposed never to come out of her own doors again alive, to be a wonder and mocking stock to the world.

But the Duke, more amazed to hear this strange discourse of Silvio, came unto him, whom when he had viewed with better consideration, perceived indeed that it was Silla, the daughter of Duke Pontus, and embracing her in his arms, he said:

"O, the branch of all virtue, and the flower of courtesy itself! pardon me, I beseech you, of all such discourtesies as I have ignorantly committed towards you, desiring you that without farther memory of ancient griefs, you will accept of me, who is more joyful and better contented with your presence, than if the whole world were at my commandment. Where hath there ever been found such liberality in a lover, which having been trained up and nourished amongst the delicacies and banquets of the court, accompanied with trains of many fair and noble ladies, living in pleasure and in the midst of delights, would so prodigally adventure yourself, neither fearing mishaps, nor misliking to take such pains as I know you have not been accustomed unto? O, liberality never heard of before! O, fact that can never be sufficiently rewarded! O, true love most pure and unfeigned! Here withal sending for the most artificial workmen, he provided for her sundry suits of sumptuous apparel, and the marriage day appointed, which was celebrated with great triumph through the whole city of Constantinople, everyone praising the nobleness of the Duke; but so many as did behold the excellent beauty of Silla gave her the praise above all the rest of the ladies in the troupe.

The matter seemed so wonderful and strange, that the bruit was spread throughout all the parts of Greece, insomuch that it came to the hearing of Silvio; who, as you have heard, remained in those parts to inquire of his sister: he being the gladdest man in the world, hastened to Constantinople, where, coming to his sister, he was joyfully received, and most lovingly welcomed, and entertained of the Duke his brother-in-law. After he had remained there two or three days, the Duke revealed unto Silvio, the whole discourse how it happened between his sister and the Lady Julina, and how his sister was challenged for getting a woman with child. Silvio, blushing with these words, was struck with great remorse to make Julina amends, understanding her to be a noble lady, and was left defamed to the world through his default; he therefore betrayed the whole circumstance to the Duke, whereof the Duke being very joyful, immediately repaired with Silvio to the house of Julina, whom they found in her chamber in great lamentation and mourning. To whom the Duke said: "Take courage, madam, for behold here a gentleman that will not stick both to father your child and to take you for his wife; no inferior person, but the son and heir of a noble Duke, worthy of your estate and dignity."

Julina, seeing Silvio in place, did know very well that he was the father of her child, and was so ravished with joy, that she knew not whether she were awake, or in some dream. Silvio, embracing her in his arms, craving forgiveness of all that was past, concluded with her the marriage day, which was presently accomplished with great joy and contentment to all parties. And thus, Silvio having attained a noble wife, and Silla, his sister, her desired husband, they passed the residue of their days with such delight as those have accomplished the perfection of their felicities.

THOMAS DELONEY

(*c.*1543–*c.*1600)

THOMAS DELONEY was a silk-weaver by trade. He wrote a great number of ballads, which became popular, and he was generally regarded as the successor of William Elderton (d. 1592?). He also wrote the following works, which were well received: *The Gentle Craft*, in praise of shoe-makers; *Jack of Newbury*, and *Thomas of Reading, or, The Six Worthy Yeomen of the West.*

The following story is taken from the last-named book.

HOW THOMAS OF READING WAS MURDERED

THOMAS OF READING having many occasions to come to London, as well about his own affairs, as also the King's business, being in a great office under his Majesty, it chanced on a time, that his host and hostess of Colebrook (who through covetousness had murdered many of their guests) appointed him to be the next fat pig that should be killed: for it is to be understood, that, when they plotted the murder of any man, this was always their formula: "Wife, there is now a fat pig to be had, if you want one." Whereupon she would answer thus: "I pray you put him in the hogsty till to-morrow."

This was when any man came thither alone without others in his company, and they saw he had great store of money. This man should then be laid in the chamber right over the kitchen, which was a fair chamber, and better set out than any other in the house: the best bedstead therein, though it were little and low, yet was it most cunningly carved, and fair to the eye: the feet whereof were fast nailed to the chamber floor, in such sort that it could not in any wise fall, and the bed that lay therein was fast sewed to the sides of the bedstead. Moreover, that part of the chamber whereupon the bedstead stood was made in such sort, that, by the pulling out of two iron pins below in the kitchen, it was to be let down and taken up by a draw-bridge, or in manner of a trap-door: moreover, in the kitchen, directly under the place where this should fall, was a mighty great cauldron, wherein they used to seethe their liquor when they went to brewing. Now the men appointed for the slaughter were laid into this bed, and in the dead time of the night, when they were sound asleep, by plucking out the aforesaid iron pins, down would the man fall out of his bed into the boiling cauldron, and all the clothes that were upon him: where being suddenly scalded and drowned, he was never able to cry or speak one word.

Then had they a little ladder ever standing ready in the kitchen, by the which they presently mounted into the said chamber, and there took away the man's apparel, as also his money, in his mail or capcase: and then lifting up the said falling floor which hung by hinges, they made it fast as before. The dead body would they take presently out of the cauldron, and throw it down the river, which ran near unto their house.

Now if in the morning any of the rest of the guests that had talked with the murdered man ere eve, chanced to ask for him, as having occasion to ride the same way that he should have done, the good man would answer, that he took horse a good while before day, and that he himself did set him forward. The horse the good man would also take out of the stable, and convey him to a hay barn of his, that stood from his house a mile or two, whereof himself did always keep the keys full charily, and when any hay was to be brought from thence, with his own hands he would deliver it: then before the horse should go from thence, he would dismark him: as, if he had a long tail, he would make him curtail; or else crop his ears, or cut his mane, or put out one of his eyes: and by this means he kept himself unknown.

Now Thomas of Reading, as I said before, being marked and kept for a fat pig, he was laid in the same chamber of death, but by reason Gray of Gloucester chanced also to come that night, he escaped scalding.

The next time he came he was laid there again, but before he fell asleep, or was warm in bed, one came riding through the town and cried piteously that London was all a fire, and that it had burned down Thomas Becket's house in West Cheap, and a great number more in the same street. "And yet," quoth he, "the fire is not quenched." Which tidings when Thomas of Reading heard, he was very sorrowful, for of this same Becket that day he had received a great piece of money, and had left in his house many of his writings, and some that appertained to the King also: therefore there was no way but he would ride back to London presently, to see how the matter stood: thereupon making himself ready he departed. This cross fortune caused his host to frown. "Nevertheless," quoth he, "the next time will pay for all."

Notwithstanding, God so wrought, that they were prevented then likewise by reason of a great fray that happened in the house betwixt a couple that fell out at dice; insomuch as the murderers themselves were enforced to call him up, being a man in great authority, that he might set the house in quietness; out of the which by means of this quarrel, they doubted to lose many things.

Another time when he should have been laid in the same place, he fell so sick, that he requested to have somebody to watch with him; whereby also they could not bring their vile purpose to pass. But hard it is to escape the illfortunes whereunto man is allotted: for albeit that the next time that he came to London, his horse stumbled and broke one of his legs as he would ride homeward, yet hired he another to hasten his own death; for there was no remedy but he should go to Colebrook that night: but by the way he was heavy asleep that he could scant keep himself in his saddle; and when he came near unto the town, his nose burst out suddenly a bleeding.

Well, to his inn he came, and so heavy was his heart that he could eat no meat: his host and hostess hearing he was so melancholy, came up to cheer him, saying: "Why, Master Cole, what ails you to-night? Never did we see you thus sad before: will it please you to have a quart of burnt sack?"

"With a good will," quoth he, "and I would that Tom Dove were here, he would surely make me merry, and we should lack no music: but I am sorry for the man with all my heart, that he is come so far behindhand: alas, so much can every man say, but what good doth it him? No, no, it is not words can help a man in this case, the man hath need of other relief than this. Let me see: I have but one child in the world and that is my daughter; half that I have is hers, the other half my wife's. What then, shall I be good to nobody but them? In conscience, my wealth is too much for a couple to possess: and what is our religion without charity? And to whom is charity more to be shown than to decayed householders? Good my host, lend me a pen and ink, and some paper; for I will write a letter unto the poor man straight; and something I will give him. The alms which a man bestows with his own hands he shall be sure to have delivered, and who knows how long I shall live?"

With that his hostess dissembling answered: "Doubt not, Master Cole, you are like enough by the course of nature to live many years."

Quoth he: "I never found my heart so heavy before."

By this time pen, ink, and paper were brought, and he wrote as followeth: "In the Name of God, Amen. I bequeath my soul to God, and my body to the ground, my goods equally between my wife Elinor and my daughter Isabel. Item. I give to Thomas Dove of Exeter one hundred pounds, nay, that is too little, I give to Thomas Dove two hundred pounds in money, to be paid unto him presently upon his demand thereof, by my said wife and daughter."

"Ha, how sayest thou, host," quoth he, "is not this well? I pray you read it."

His host looking thereupon, said: "Why, Master Cole, what have you written here? You said you would write a letter, but methinks you have made a will, what need have you to do thus? Thanks be to God, you may live many fair years."

" 'Tis true," quoth Cole, "if it please God: and I trust this writing cannot shorten my days. But let me see, have I made a will? Now, I promise you, I did verily purpose to write a letter: notwithstanding, I have written that which God put into my mind. But look again my host, is it not written there that Dove shall have two hundred pounds, to be paid when he comes to demand it?"

"Yes, indeed," said his host.

"Well then, all is well," said Cole, "and it shall go as it is."

Then folding it up he sealed it, desiring that his host should send it to Exeter. He promised that he would: notwithstanding Cole was not satisfied, but after some pause, he would needs hire one to carry it. And so sitting down sadly in his chair again, upon a sudden he burst forth a weeping; they demanding the cause thereof he spake as followeth: "No cause of these fears I know: but it cometh into my mind, how when I set toward this my last journey to London, how my daughter took on, what a coil she kept me stay: and I could not be rid of the little baggage a long time, she did so hang about me; when her mother by violence took her away, she cried out most mainly: "O my father, my father, I shall never see him again."

"Alas, pretty soul," quoth his hostess, "this was but mere kindness in the girl, and it seemeth she is very fond of you. But alas, why should grieve at this? You must consider that it was but childishness."

"Ay, it is indeed," said Cole, and with that he began to nod.

Then they asked him if he would go to bed?

"No," he answered, "although I am heavy, I have no mind to go to bed at all."

With that certain musicians of the town came to the chamber, and knowing Master Cole was there, drew out their instruments, and very solemnly began to play.

"This music comes very well," said Cole, and when he had listened awhile thereunto, he said: "Methinks these instruments sound like the ring of St. Mary Overies bells, but the bass drowns all the rest: and in my ear it is like a bell that rings a forenoon's knell. I pray you let them leave off, and bear them this simple reward."

The musicians being gone, his host asked if now it would please him to go to bed: "for," quoth he, "it is well near eleven of the clock."

With that Cole, beholding his host and hostess earnestly, began to start back, saying: "What ails you to look so like pale death? What have you done, that your hands are thus bloody?"

"What, my hands?" said the host. "Why, you may see they are neither bloody nor foul: either your eyes do greatly dazzle, or else fancies of a troubled mind do delude you."

"Alas, my host, you may see," quoth he, "how weak my wits are, I never had my head so idle before. Come, let me drink once more, and then I will to bed, and trouble you no longer."

With that he made himself ready, and his hostess was very diligent to warm a kerchief and put it about his head. Said he: "I am not sick, thank God, but such an alteration I find in myself as I never did before."

With that the screech-owl cried piteously, and anon after the night raven sat croaking hard by his window. "Mercy upon me," quoth he, "what an ill-favoured cry do yonder carrion birds make." And therewithal he laid him down in his bed, from whence he never rose again.

His host and hostess, that all this while noted his troubled mind, began to commune betwixt themselves thereof. And the man said, he knew not what were best to be done. "By my consent," quoth he, "the matter should pass, for I think it is best not to meddle with him."

"What, man," quoth she, "faint you now? Have you done so many, and do you shrink at this?" Then, showing him a great deal of gold which Cole had left with her, she said: "Would it not grieve a body's heart to lose this? Hang the old churl, what should he do living any longer? He hath too much, and we have too little: tut, husband, let the thing be done, and then this is our own."

Her wicked counsel was followed, and when they had listened at his chamber door, they heard the man sound asleep. "All is safe," quoth they; and down into the kitchen they go, their servants being all abed, and pulling out the iron pin, the man dropped out into the boiling cauldron. He being dead, they betwixt them cast his body into the river, his clothes they made away, and made all things as it should be: but when he came to the stable to convey thence Cole's horse, the stable door being open, the horse had got loose, and with a part of the halter about his neck, and straw trussed under him as the ostlers had dressed him ere eve, he was gone out at the back ride, which led into a great field adjoining to the house, and so leaping divers hedges had got into a ground where a mare was grazing, with whom he kept up such a coil that they got into the highway, where one of the town, meeting them, knew the mare, and brought her and the horse to the man that owned her.

In the mean space the musicians had been at the inn, and in requital of their evening gift, they intended to give Cole some music in the morning. The goodman told them he took horse before day: likewise there was a guest in the house that would have borne him company to Reading, to whom the host also answered, that he himself set him upon horseback, and that he went long ago. Anon came the man that owned the mare, inquiring up and down, to know if none of them missed a horse. Who said no. At last he came to the sign of the Crane, where Cole lay: and calling the ostlers he demanded of them if they lacked one, and they said no.

"Why then," said the man, "I perceive my mare is good for something, for if I send her to the field single, she will come home double." Thus it passed on all that day and the night following.

But the next day after, Cole's wife, musing that her husband came not home, sent one of her men on horseback to see if he could meet him. "And if," quoth she, "you meet him not betwixt this and Colebrook, ask for him at the Crane, but if you find him not there, then ride to London: for I doubt he is either sick, or else some mischance hath fallen upon him."

The fellow did so, and asking for him at Colebrook, they answered, he went homeward from thence such a day. The servant musing what should be become of his master, and making inquiry in the town for him: at length one told him of a horse that was found on the highway, and no man knew whence he came. He going to see the horse, knew him presently, and to the Crane he goes with him. The host of the house perceiving this, was blank, and that night fled secretly away. The fellow going unto the Justice desired his help. Presently after word was brought that Jarman of the Crane was gone: then all the men said, he had sure made away with Cole: and the musicians told what Jarman said to them when they would have given Cole music. Then the woman being apprehended and examined, confessed the truth. Jarman soon after was taken in Windsor Forest. He and his wife were both hanged, after they had laid open all these things before expressed. Also he confessed, that he being a carpenter made that false falling floor, and how his wife devised it. And how they had murdered by that means forty persons. And yet notwithstanding all the money which they had gotten thereby, they prospered not, but at their death were found in debt.

When the King heard of this murder, he was for the space of seven days so sorrowful and heavy, as he would not hear any suit: giving also commandment, that the house should quite be consumed with fire, wherein Cole was murdered, and that no man should ever build upon that cursed ground.

Cole's substance at his death was exceeding great: he had daily in his house an hundred men servants, and forty maids: he maintained besides above two or three hundred people, spinners, and carders, and a great many other householders. His wife after never married, and at her death she bestowed a mighty sum of money towards the maintaining of the new builded monastery. Her daughter was most richly married to a gentleman of great worship, and she had many children. And some say that the river wherein Cole was cast, did ever since carry the name of Cole, being called the river of Cole, and the town of Colebrook.

DANIEL DEFOE

(*c.* 1660–1731)

DANIEL DEFOE (his name was originally Foe) was probably the most prolific of all English writers, no less than five hundred and fifty works being attributed to him. His industry was prodigious, for he only began his literary career in 1694, with *The Englishman's Choice*. This was followed by a flood of books and pamphlets on political, religious, economic, and social subjects. He also wrote several narratives, real and fictitious, and it must be put to the credit of his imagination and skill that the fictitious stories are almost as convincing as the real. *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) is the work that made him famous; and among other works of his that are still highly esteemed are *The Memoirs of a Cavalier* (1720), *The Life of Captain Singleton* (1722), *Moll Flanders* (1722), *Journal of the Plague Year* (1722), and *The Fortunate Mistress* (*Roxana*) (1723).

The "True Relation of the Apparition of One Mrs. Veal" appeared in 1706.

TRUE RELATION OF
THE APPARITION OF ONE MRS. VEAL

THIS thing is so rare in all its circumstances, and on so good authority, that my reading and conversation have not given me anything like it. It is fit to gratify the most ingenious and serious inquirer. Mrs. Bargrave is the person to whom Mrs. Veal appeared after her death; she is my intimate friend, and I can vouch for her reputation for these fifteen or sixteen years, on my own knowledge; and I can affirm the good character she had from her youth to the time of my acquaintance. Though, since this relation, she is calumniated by some people that are friends to the brother of Mrs. Veal who appeared to think the relation of this appearance to be a reflection, and endeavour what they can to blast Mrs. Bargrave's reputation and to laugh the story out of countenance. But by the circumstances thereof, and the cheerful disposition of Mrs. Bargrave, notwithstanding the ill usage of a very wicked husband, there is not yet the least sign of dejection in her face; nor did I ever hear her let fall a desponding or murmuring expression; nay, not when actually under her husband's barbarity, which I have been a witness to, and several other persons of undoubted reputation.

Now you must know Mrs. Veal was a maiden gentlewoman of about thirty years of age, and for some years past had been troubled with fits, which were perceived coming on her by her going off from her discourse very abruptly to some impertinence. She was maintained by an only brother, and kept his house in Dover. She was a very pious woman, and her brother a very sober man, to all appearance; but now he does all he can to null and quash the story. Mrs. Veal was intimately acquainted with Mrs. Bargrave from her childhood. Mrs. Veal's circumstances were then mean; her father did not take care of his children as he ought, so that they were exposed to hardships. And Mrs. Bargrave in those days had as unkind a father, though she wanted neither for food nor clothing; while Mrs. Veal wanted for both, insomuch that she would often say, "Mrs. Bargrave, you are not only the best, but the only friend I have in the world; and no circumstance of life shall ever dissolve my friendship." They would often condole each other's adverse fortunes, and read together *Drelincourt upon Death*, and other books; and so, like two Christian friends, they comforted each other under their sorrow.

Some time after, Mr. Veal's friends got him a place in the custom-house at Dover, which occasioned Mrs. Veal, by little and little, to fall off from her intimacy with Mrs. Bargrave, though there was never any such thing as a quarrel; but an indifference came on by degrees, till at last Mrs. Bargrave had not seen her in two years and a half, though above a twelvemonth of the time Mrs. Bargrave hath been absent from Dover, and this last half-year has been in Canterbury about two months of the time, dwelling in a house of her own.

In this house, on the eighth of September, one thousand seven hundred and five, she was sitting alone in the forenoon, thinking over her unfortunate life, and arguing herself into a due resignation to Providence, though her condition seemed hard: "And," said she, "I have been provided for hitherto, and doubt not but I shall be still, and am well satisfied that my afflictions shall end when it is most fit for me." And then took up her sewing work, which she had no sooner done but she hears a knocking at the door; she went to see who was there, and this proved to be Mrs. Veal, her old friend, who was in a riding habit. At that moment of time the clock struck twelve at noon.

"Madam," says Mrs. Bargrave, "I am surprised to see you, you who have been so long a stranger"; but told her she was glad to see her, and offered to salute her, which Mrs. Veal complied with, till their lips almost touched, and then Mrs. Veal drew her hand across her own eyes, and said, "I am not very well," and so waived it. She told Mrs. Bargrave she was going a journey, and had a great mind to see her first. "But," says Mrs. Bargrave, "how can you take a journey alone? I am amazed at it, because I know you have a fond brother." "Oh," says Mrs. Veal, "I gave my brother the slip, and came away, because I had so great a desire to see you before I took my journey." So Mrs. Bargrave went in with her into another room within the first, and Mrs. Veal sat her down in an elbow-chair, in which Mrs. Bargrave was sitting when she heard Mrs. Veal knock. "Then," says Mrs. Veal, "my dear friend, I am come to renew our old friendship again, and beg your pardon for my breach of it; and if you can forgive me, you are the best of women." "Oh," says Mrs. Bargrave, "do not mention such a thing; I have not had an uneasy thought about it." "What did you think of me?" says Mrs. Veal. Says Mrs. Bargrave, "I thought you were like the rest of the world, and that prosperity had made you forget yourself and me." Then Mrs. Veal reminded Mrs. Bargrave of the many friendly offices she did her in former days, and much of the conversation they had with each other in the times of their adversity; what books they read, and what comfort in particular they received from Drelincourt's *Book of Death*, which was the best, she said, on the subject ever wrote. She also mentioned Dr. Sherlock, and two Dutch books, which were translated, wrote upon death, and several others. But Drelincourt, she said, had the clearest notions of death and of the future state of any who had handled that subject. Then she asked Mrs. Bargrave whether she had Drelincourt. She said, "Yes." Says Mrs. Veal, "Fetch it." And so Mrs. Bargrave goes upstairs and brings it down. Says Mrs. Veal, "Dear Mrs. Bargrave, if the eyes of our faith were as open as the eyes of our body, we should see numbers of angels about us for our guard. The notions we have of Heaven now are nothing like what it is, as Drelincourt says; therefore be comforted under your afflictions, and believe that the Almighty has a particular regard to you, and that your afflictions are marks of God's favour; and when they have done the business they are sent for, they shall be removed from you. And believe me, my dear friend, believe what I say to you, one minute of future happiness will infinitely reward you for all your sufferings. For I can never believe" (and clasps her hand upon her knee with great earnestness, which, indeed, ran through most of her discourse) "that ever God will suffer you to spend all your days in this afflicted state. But be assured that your afflictions shall leave you, or you them, in a short time." She spake in that pathetical and heavenly manner that Mrs. Bargrave wept several times, she was so deeply affected with it.

Then Mrs. Veal mentioned Doctor Kendrick's *Ascetic*, at the end of which he gives an account of the lives of the primitive Christians. Their pattern she recommended to our imitation, and said, "Their conversation was not like this of our age. For now," says she, "there is nothing but vain, frothy discourse, which is far different from theirs. Theirs was to edification, and to build one another up in faith, so that they were not as we are, nor are we as they were. But," said she, "we ought to do as they did; there was a hearty friendship among them; but where is it now to be found?" Says Mrs. Bargrave, "It is hard indeed to find a true friend in these days." Says Mrs. Veal, "Mr. Norris has a fine copy of verses, called *Friendship in Perfection*, which I wonderfully admire. Have you seen the book?" says Mrs. Veal. "No," says Mrs. Bargrave, "but I have the verses of my own writing out." "Have you?" says Mrs. Veal; "then fetch them"; which she did from above stairs, and offered them to Mrs. Veal to read, who refused, and waived the thing, saying, "holding down her head would make it ache"; and then desiring Mrs. Bargrave to read them to her, which she did. As they were admiring *Friendship*, Mrs. Veal said, "Dear Mrs. Bargrave, I shall love you for ever." In these verses there is twice used the word Elysian. "Ah!" says Mrs. Veal, "these poets have such names for Heaven." She would often draw her hand across her own eyes, and say, "Mrs. Bargrave, do not you think I am mightily impaired by my fits?" "No," says Mrs. Bargrave; "I think you look as well as ever I knew you."

After this discourse, which the apparition put in much finer words than Mrs. Bargrave said she could pretend to, and as much more as she can remember—for it cannot be thought that an hour and three quarters' conversation could all be retained, though the main of it she thinks she does—she said to Mrs. Bargrave she would have her write a letter to her brother, and tell him she would have him give rings to such and such; and that there was a purse of gold in her cabinet, and that she would have two broad pieces given to her cousin Watson.

Talking at this rate, Mrs. Bargrave thought that a fit was coming upon her, and so placed herself on a chair just before her knees, to keep her from falling to the ground, if her fits should occasion it; for the elbow-chair, she thought, would keep her from falling on either side. And to divert Mrs. Veal, as she thought, took hold of her gown-sleeve several times, and commended it. Mrs. Veal told her it was a scoured silk and newly made up. But, for all this, Mrs. Veal persisted in her request, and told Mrs. Bargrave she must not deny her. And she would have her tell her brother all their conversation when she had the opportunity. "Dear Mrs. Veal," says Mrs. Bargrave, "it is much better, methinks, to do it yourself." "No," says Mrs. Veal, "though it seems impertinent to you now, you will see more reasons for it hereafter." Mrs. Bargrave, then, to satisfy her importunity, was going to fetch a pen and ink, but Mrs. Veal said, "Let it alone now, but do it when I am gone; but you must be sure to do it"; which was one of the last things she enjoined her at parting, and so she promised her.

Then Mrs. Veal asked for Mrs. Bargrave's daughter. She said she was not at home. "But if you have a mind to see her," says Mrs. Bargrave, "I'll send for her." "Do," says Mrs. Veal; on which she left her, and went to a neighbour's to see her; and by the time Mrs. Bargrave was returning, Mrs. Veal was without the door in the street, in the face of the beast-market, on a Saturday (which is market-day), and stood ready to part as soon as Mrs. Bargrave came to her. She asked her why she was in such haste. She said she must be going, though perhaps she might not go her journey till Monday; and told Mrs. Bargrave she hoped she might see her again at her cousin Watson's before she went, whither she was going. Then she said she would take her leave of her, and walked from Mrs. Bargrave, in her view, till a turning interrupted the sight of her, which was three-quarters after one in the afternoon.

Mrs. Veal died the seventh of September, at twelve o'clock noon, of her fits, and had not above four hours' senses before her death, in which time she received the sacrament. The next day after Mrs. Veal's appearance, being Sunday, Mrs. Bargrave was mightily indisposed with a cold and sore throat, that she could not go out that day; but on Monday morning she sends a person to Captain Watson's to know if Mrs. Veal was there. They wondered at Mrs. Bargrave's inquiry, and sent her word she was not there, nor was expected. At this answer, Mrs. Bargrave told the maid she had certainly mistook the name or made some blunder. And though she was ill, she put on her hood and went herself to Captain Watson's, though she knew none of the family, to see if Mrs. Veal was there or not. They said they wondered at her asking, for that she had not been in town; they were sure, if she had she would have been there. Says Mrs. Bargrave, "I am sure she was with me on Saturday almost two hours." They said it was impossible, for they must have seen her if she had. In comes Captain Watson, while they were in dispute, and said that Mrs. Veal was certainly dead, and the escutcheons were making. This strangely surprised Mrs. Bargrave, when she sent to the person immediately who had the care of them, and found it true. Then she related the whole story to Captain Watson's family; and what gown she had on, and how striped; and that Mrs. Veal told her that it was scoured. Then Mrs. Watson cried out, "You have seen her indeed, for none knew but Mrs. Veal and myself that the gown was scoured." And Mrs. Watson owned that she described the gown exactly; "for," said she, "I helped her to make it up." This Mrs. Watson blazed all about the town, and avouched the demonstration of truth of Mrs. Bargrave's seeing Mrs. Veal's apparition. And Captain Watson carried two gentlemen immediately to Mrs. Bargrave's house to hear the relation from her own mouth. And when it spread so fast that gentlemen and persons of quality, the judicious and sceptical part of the world, flocked in upon her, it at last became such a task that she was forced to go out of the way; for they were in general extremely satisfied of the truth of the thing, and plainly saw that Mrs. Bargrave was no hypochondriac, for she always appears with such a cheerful air and pleasing mien that she has gained the favour and esteem of all the gentry, and it is thought a great favour if they can but get the relation from her own mouth. I should have told you before that Mrs. Veal told Mrs. Bargrave that her sister and brother-in-law were just come down from London to see her. Says Mrs. Bargrave, "How came you to order matters so strangely?" "It could not be helped," said Mrs. Veal. And her brother and sister did come to see her, and entered the town of Dover just as Mrs. Veal was expiring. Mrs. Bargrave asked her whether she would drink some tea. Says Mrs. Veal, "I do not care if I do; but I'll warrant you this mad fellow"—meaning Mrs. Bargrave's husband—"has broke all your trinkets." "But," says Mrs. Bargrave, "I'll get something to drink in for all that"; but Mrs. Veal waived it, and said, "It is no matter; let it alone," and so it passed.

All the time I sat with Mrs. Bargrave, which was some hours, she recollected fresh sayings of Mrs. Veal. And one material thing more she told Mrs. Bargrave, that old Mr. Bretton allowed Mrs. Veal ten pounds a year, which was a secret, and unknown to Mrs. Bargrave till Mrs. Veal told her.

Mrs. Bargrave never varies in her story, which puzzles those who doubt of the truth, or are unwilling to believe it. A servant in the neighbour's yard adjoining to Mrs. Bargrave's house heard her talking to somebody an hour of the time Mrs. Veal was with her. Mrs. Bargrave went to her next neighbour's the very moment she parted with Mrs. Veal, and told her what ravishing conversation she had had with an old friend, and told the whole of it. Drelincourt's *Book of Death* is, since this happened, bought up strangely. And it is to be observed that, notwithstanding all the trouble and fatigue Mrs. Bargrave has undergone upon this account, she never took the value of a farthing, nor suffered her daughter to take anything of anybody, and therefore can have no interest in telling the story.

But Mr. Veal does what he can to stifle the matter, and said he would see Mrs. Bargrave; but yet it is certain matter of fact that he has been at Captain Watson's since the death of his sister, and yet never went near Mrs. Bargrave; and some of his friends report her to be a liar, and that she knew of Mr. Bretton's ten pounds a year. But the person who pretends to say so has the reputation to be a notorious liar among persons whom I know to be of undoubted credit. Now, Mr. Veal is more of a gentleman than to say she lies, but says a bad husband has crazed her; but she needs only present herself, and it will effectually confuse that pretence. Mr. Veal says he asked his sister on her death-bed whether she had a mind to dispose of anything. And she said no. Now the things which Mrs. Veal's apparition would have disposed of were so trifling, and nothing of justice aimed at in her disposal, that the design of it appears to me to be only in order to make Mrs. Bargrave satisfy the world of the reality thereof as to what she had seen and heard, and to secure her reputation among the reasonable and understanding part of mankind. And then again, Mr. Veal owns that there was a purse of gold; but it was not found in her cabinet, but in a comb-box. This looks improbable; for that Mrs. Watson owned that Mrs. Veal was so very careful of the key of her cabinet that she would trust nobody with it; and if so, no doubt she would not trust her gold out of it. And Mrs. Veal's often drawing her hands over her eyes, and asking Mrs. Bargrave whether her fits had not impaired her, looks to me as if she did it on purpose to remind Mrs. Bargrave of her fits, to prepare her not to think it strange that she should put her upon writing to her brother, to dispose of rings and gold, which looks so much like a dying person's bequest; and it took accordingly with Mrs. Bargrave as the effect of her fits coming upon her, and was one of the many instances of her wonderful love to her and care of her, that she should not be affrighted, which, indeed, appears in her whole management, particularly in her coming to her in the daytime, waiving the salutation, and when she was alone; and then the manner of her parting, to prevent a second attempt to salute her.

Now, why Mr. Veal should think this relation a reflection—as it is plain he does, by his endeavouring to stifle it—I cannot imagine; because the generality believe her to be a good spirit, her discourse was so heavenly. Her two great errands were, to comfort Mrs. Bargrave in her affliction, and to ask her forgiveness for her breach of friendship, and with a pious discourse to encourage her. So that, after all, to suppose that Mrs. Bargrave could hatch such an invention as this, from Friday noon to Saturday noon—supposing that she knew of Mrs. Veal's death the very first moment—without jumbling circumstances, and without any interest, too, she must be more witty, fortunate, and wicked, too, than any indifferent person, I dare say, will allow. I asked Mrs. Bargrave several times if she was sure she felt the gown. She answered, modestly, "If my senses be to be relied on, I am sure of it." I asked her if she heard a sound when she clapped her hand upon her knee. She said she did not remember she did, but said she appeared to be as much a substance as I did who talked with her. "And I may," said she, "be as soon persuaded that your apparition is talking to me now as that I did not really see her; for I was under no manner of fear, and received her as a friend, and parted with her as such. I would not," says she, "give one farthing to make any one believe it; I have no interest in it; nothing but trouble is entailed upon me for a long time, for aught I know; and, had it not come to light by accident, it would never have been made public." But now she says she will make her own private use of it, and keep herself out of the way as much as she can; and so she has done since. She says she had a gentleman who came thirty miles to her to hear the relation; and that she had told it to a roomful of people at the time. Several particular gentlemen have had the story from Mrs. Bargrave's own mouth.

This thing has very much affected me, and I am as well satisfied as I am of the best-grounded matter of fact. And why we should dispute matter of fact, because we cannot solve things of which we can have no certain or demonstrative notions, seems strange to me; Mrs. Bargrave's authority and sincerity alone would have been undoubted in any other case.

JONATHAN SWIFT

(1667–1745)

JONATHAN SWIFT, though born in Ireland, was descended from a Yorkshire family. He came to England in 1688, for two years acting as secretary to Sir William Temple, whom he again served in 1696, when he met "Stella." He had earlier been ordained, later held several livings, and in 1713 became Dean of St. Patrick's, Dublin. He took an active part in politics in England, and, presently, in Ireland, where the publication of his *Drapier's Letters* (1724) created an immense sensation. Though Dryden said, "Cousin Jonathan, you will never be a poet," Swift's poetry is very virile and interesting. His prose is beyond all praise. His output was immense, and there is scarcely anything he wrote which he did not invest with his gifts of imagination and sarcasm. He poured forth all his bitterness and contempt for mankind in *Gulliver's Travels* (1726), and it is one of the ironies of fate that this is still a favourite gift-book for children. Among his masterpieces are *The Battle of the Books* and *A Tale of a Tub*, which were two of his earliest writings.

"An Account of the Death of Mr. Partridge," which is given here, was first printed in 1708, as part of *The Bickerstaff Papers.*

An Account of

THE DEATH OF MR. PARTRIDGE

MY LORD, in obedience to your Lordship's commands, as well as to satisfy my own curiosity, I have some days past inquired constantly after Partridge the almanack-maker, of whom it was foretold in *Mr. Bickerstaff's Predictions*, published about a month ago, that he should die the 29th instant, about eleven at night, of a raging fever. I had some sort of knowledge of him when I was employed in the revenue, because he used every year to present me with his almanack, as he did other gentlemen, upon the score of some little gratuity we gave him. I saw him accidentally once or twice about ten days before he died, and observed he began very much to droop and languish, though I hear his friends did not seem to apprehend him in any danger. About two or three days ago he grew ill, was confined first to his chamber, and in a few hours after to his bed, where Dr. Case* and Mrs. Kirleus† were sent for to visit and to prescribe to him. Upon this intelligence I sent thrice every day one servant or other to inquire after his health; and yesterday, about four in the afternoon, word was brought me, "that he was past hopes": upon which I prevailed with myself to go and see him, partly out of commiseration, and, I confess, partly out of curiosity. He knew me very well, seemed surprised at my condescension, and made me compliments upon it, as well as he could in the condition he was. The people about him said, "he had been for some time delirious"; but when I saw him he had his understanding as well as ever I knew, and spoke strong and hearty, without any seeming uneasiness or constraint. After I had told him "how sorry I was to see him in those melancholy circumstances," and said some other civilities suitable to the occasion, I desired him "to tell me freely and ingenuously whether the predictions Mr. Bickerstaff had published relating to his death had not too much affected and worked on his imagination." He confessed, "he had often had it in his head, but never with much apprehension till about a fortnight before; since which time it had the perpetual possession of his mind and thoughts, and he did verily believe was the true natural cause of his present distemper: for," said he, "I am thoroughly persuaded, and I think I have very good reasons, that Mr. Bickerstaff spoke altogether by guess, and knew no more what will happen this year than I did myself."

I told him "his discourse surprised me; and I would be glad he were in a state of health to be able to tell me what reason he had to be convinced of Mr. Bickerstaff's ignorance." He replied, "I am a poor ignorant fellow, bred to a mean trade, yet I have sense enough to know that all pretences of foretelling by astrology are deceits, for this manifest reason; because the wise and the learned, who can only judge whether there be any truth in this science, do all unanimously agree to laugh at and despise it; and none but the poor ignorant vulgar give it any credit, and that only upon the word of such silly wretches as I and my fellows who can hardly write or read." I then asked him, "why he had not calculated his own nativity, to see whether it agreed with Bickerstaff's prediction?" At which he shook his head, and said, "Oh! sir, this is no time for jesting, but for repenting those fooleries, as I do now from the very bottom of my heart."—"By what I can gather from you," said I, "the observations and predictions you printed with your almanacks were mere impositions on the people." He replied, "If it were otherwise, I should have the less to answer for. We have a common form for all those things: as to foretelling the weather, we never meddle with that, but leave it to the printer, who takes it out of any old almanack as he thinks fit; the rest was my own invention, to make my almanack sell, having a wife to maintain and no other way to get my bread; for mending old shoes is a poor livelihood; and," added he, sighing, "I wish I may not have done more mischief by my physic than my astrology; though I had some good receipts from my grandmother, and my own compositions were such as I thought could at least do no hurt."

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* John Case was many years a noted practitioner in physic and astrology. He was looked upon as the successor of Lilly and of Saffold.

† Widow of John Kirleus, son of Dr. Thomas Kirleus.

I had some other discourse with him, which I now cannot call to mind; and I fear have already tired your Lordship. I shall only add one circumstance, that on his death-bed he declared himself a nonconformist, and had a fanatic preacher to be his spiritual guide. After half an hour's conversation I took my leave, being almost stifled with the closeness of the room. I imagined he could not hold out long, and therefore withdrew to a little coffeehouse hard by, leaving a servant at the house with orders to come immediately and tell me, as near as he could, the minute when Partridge should expire, which was not above two hours after; when, looking upon my watch, I found it to be about five minutes after seven; by which it is clear that Mr. Bickerstaff was mistaken almost four hours in his calculation. In the other circumstances he was exact enough. But whether he has been the cause of this poor man's death, as well as the predictor, may be very reasonably disputed. However, it must be confessed the matter is odd enough, whether we should endeavour to account for it by chance or the effect of imagination: for my own part, though I believe no man has less faith in these matters, yet I shall wait with some impatience, and not without some expectation, the fulfilling of Mr. Bickerstaff's second prediction, that the Cardinal de Noailles is to die upon the 4th of April; and if that should be verified as exactly as this of poor Partridge, I must own I should be wholly surprised and at a loss, and should infallibly expect the accomplishment of all the rest.

JOSEPH ADDISON

(1672–1719)

JOSEPH ADDISON was educated at Charterhouse, where he had as a fellow-pupil Richard Steele, and afterward at Oxford. Through the influence of Lord Somers, he obtained, in 1699, a pension of £300 to enable him to travel on the Continent to qualify for the Diplomatic Service; but this was withdrawn after the death of William III, and he returned to London. In 1704 he was commissioned by the Government to write a poem to celebrate the victory of Blenheim. As a further reward for this poem, "The Campaign," he was given various minor posts. He was an Under-Secretary of State in 1706, and Secretary to the Lord-Lieutenant of Ireland in 1708. When Steele founded the *Tatler* (1709) he placed his pen at his friend's disposal and became a principal contributor to that and to the *Spectator* that followed it. His tragedy *Cato* (1713) was enthusiastically received.

"The Vision of Mirzah" is reprinted from the *Spectator* (No. 159).

THE VISION OF MIRZAH

WHEN I was at Grand Cairo, I picked up several Oriental manuscripts, which I have still by me. Among others I met with one entitled, *The Visions of Mirzah*, which I have read over with great pleasure. I intend to give it to the public when I have no other entertainment for them; and shall begin with the first vision, which I have translated word for word as follows:

"On the fifth day of the moon, which according to the custom of my forefathers I always keep holy, after having washed myself, and offered up my morning devotions, I ascended the high hills of Bagdat, in order to pass the rest of the day in meditation and prayer. As I was here airing myself on the tops of the mountains, I fell into a profound contemplation on the vanity of human life; and passing from one thought to another, Surely, said I, man is but a shadow and life a dream. Whilst I was thus musing, I cast my eyes towards the summit of a rock that was not far from me, where I discovered one in the habit of a shepherd, with a little musical instrument in his hand. As I looked upon him he applied it to his lips, and began to play upon it. The sound of it was exceeding sweet, and wrought into a variety of tunes that were inexpressibly melodious, and altogether different from anything I had ever heard: they put me in mind of those heavenly airs that are played to the departed souls of good men upon their first arrival in Paradise, to wear out the impressions of their last agonies, and qualify them for the pleasures of that happy place. My heart melted away in secret raptures.

"I had been often told that the rock before me was the haunt of a Genius; and that several had been entertained with music who had passed by it, but never heard that the musician had before made himself visible. When he had raised my thoughts by those transporting airs which he played, to taste the pleasures of his conversation, as I looked upon him like one astonished, he beckoned to me, and by the waving of his hand directed me to approach the place where he sat. I drew near with that reverence which is due to a superior nature; and as my heart was entirely subdued by the captivating strains I had heard, I fell down at his feet and wept. The Genius smiled upon me with a look of compassion and affability that familiarised him to my imagination, and at once dispelled all the fears and apprehensions with which I approached him. He lifted me from the ground, and taking me by the hand, Mirzah, said he, I have heard thee in thy soliloquies; follow me.

"He then led me to the highest pinnacle of the rock, and placed me on the top of it. Cast thy eyes eastward, said he, and tell me what thou seest. I see, said I, a huge valley, and a prodigious tide of water rolling through it. The valley that thou seest, said he, is the vale of misery, and the tide of water that thou seest is part of the great tide of eternity. What is the reason, said I, that the tide I see rises out of a thick mist at one end, and again loses itself in a thick mist at the other? What thou seest, said he, is that portion of eternity which is called time, measured out by the sun, and reaching from the beginning of the world to its consummation. Examine now, said he, this sea that is bounded with darkness at both ends, and tell me what thou discoverest in it. I see a bridge, said I, standing in the midst of the tide. The bridge thou seest, said he, is human life, consider it attentively. Upon a more leisurely survey of it, I found that it consisted of threescore and ten entire arches, with several broken arches, which added to those that were entire, made up the number about a hundred. As I was counting the arches, the Genius told me that this bridge consisted at first of a thousand arches; but that a great flood swept away the rest, and left the bridge in the ruinous condition I now beheld it: But tell me further, said he, what thou discoverest on it. I see multitudes of people passing over it, said I, and a black cloud hanging on each end of it. As I looked more attentively, I saw several of the passengers dropping through the bridge, into the great tide that flowed underneath it; and upon further examination, perceived there were innumerable trap-doors that lay concealed in the bridge, which the passengers no sooner trod upon, but they fell through them into the tide and immediately disappeared. These hidden pitfalls were set very thick at the entrance of the bridge, so that the throngs of people no sooner broke through the cloud, but many of them fell into them. They grew thinner towards the middle, but multiplied and lay closer together towards the end of the arches that were entire.

"There were indeed some persons, but their number was very small, that continued a kind of hobbling march on the broken arches, but fell through one after another, being quite tired and spent after so long a walk.

"I passed some time in the contemplation of this wonderful structure, and the great variety of objects which it presented. My heart was filled with a deep melancholy to see several dropping unexpectedly in the midst of mirth and jollity, and catching at everything that stood by them to save themselves. Some were looking up towards the heavens in a thoughtful posture, and in the midst of a speculation stumbled and fell out of sight. Multitudes were very busy in the pursuit of bubbles that glittered in their eyes and danced before them; but often when they thought themselves within the reach of them their footing failed and down they sunk. In this confusion of objects, I observed some with scimitars in their hands, who ran to and fro upon the bridge, thrusting several persons on trap-doors which did not seem to lie in their way, and which they might have escaped, had they not been thus forced upon them.

"The Genius seeing me indulge myself in this melancholy prospect, told me I had dwelt long enough upon it: Take thine eyes off the bridge, said he, and tell me if thou yet seest anything thou dost not comprehend. Upon looking up, What mean, said I, those great flights of birds that are perpetually hovering about the bridge, and settling upon it from time to time? I see vultures, harpies, ravens, cormorants, and among many other feathered creatures several little winged boys, that perch in great numbers upon the middle arches. These, said the Genius, are Envy, Avarice, Superstition, Despair, Love, with the like cares and passions that infest human life.

"I here fetched a deep sigh; Alas, said I, man was made in vain! How is he given away to misery and mortality! tortured in life, and swallowed up in death! The Genius, being moved with compassion towards me, bid me quit so uncomfortable a prospect; Look no more, said he, on man in the first stage of his existence, in his setting out for eternity; but cast thine eye on that thick mist into which the tide bears the several generations of mortals that fall into it. I directed my sight as I was ordered, and (whether or no the good Genius strengthened it with any supernatural force, or dissipated part of the mist that was before too thick for the eye to penetrate) I saw the valley opening at the farther end, and spreading forth into an immense ocean, that had a huge rock of adamant running through the midst of it, and dividing it into two equal parts. The clouds still rested on one half of it, insomuch that I could discover nothing in it: but the other appeared to me a vast ocean planted with innumerable islands, that were covered with fruits and flowers, and interwoven with a thousand little shining seas that ran among them. I could see persons dressed in glorious habits with garlands upon their heads, passing among the trees, lying down by the sides of fountains, or resting on beds of flowers; and could hear a confused harmony of singing birds, falling waters, human voices, and musical instruments. Gladness grew in me upon the discovery of so delightful a scene. I wished for the wings of an eagle, that I might fly away to those happy seats; but the Genius told me there was no passage to them, except through the gates of death that I saw opening every moment upon the bridge. The islands, said he, that lie so fresh and green before thee, and with which the whole face of the ocean appears spotted as far as thou canst see, are more in number than the sands on the sea-shore; there are myriads of islands behind those which thou here discoverest, reaching farther than thine eye, or even thine imagination can extend itself. These are the mansions of good men after death, who, according to the degree and kinds of virtue in which they excelled, are distributed among these several islands, which abound with pleasures of different kinds and degrees, suitable to the relishes and perfections of those who are settled in them; every island is a paradise accommodated to its respective inhabitants. Are not these, O Mirzah, habitations worth contending for? Does life appear miserable, that gives thee opportunities of earning such a reward? Is death to be feared, that will convey thee to so happy an existence? Think not man was made in vain, who has such an eternity reserved for him. I gazed with inexpressible pleasure on these happy islands. At length, said I, show me now, I beseech thee, the secrets that lie hid under those dark clouds which cover the ocean on the other side of the rock of adamant. The Genius making me no answer, I turned about to address myself to him a second time, but I found that he had left me; I then turned again to the vision which I had been so long contemplating; but instead of the rolling tide, the arched bridge, and the happy islands, I saw nothing but the long hollow valley of Bagdat, with oxen, sheep, and camels grazing upon the sides of it."

SIR RICHARD STEELE

(1672–1729)

RICHARD STEELE was born in Dublin, but was brought to London and educated at Charterhouse, where Addison was a fellow-pupil. He was given a commission in the Horse Guards in 1694, and led the life of a man about town. In 1701 he published *The Christian Hero*, which was received with much merriment by the roisterous set in which he moved, though it was written in all sincerity. Eight years later he founded the *Tatler*, to which he contributed freely, and he followed this with the *Spectator*, having in both cases the invaluable assistance of Addison. It was, however, Steele who outlined the character of Sir Roger de Coverley, though Addison elaborated it.

"The Story of the Cornish Lovers" is reprinted from the *Tatler* (No. 82; October 18, 1709).

THE STORY OF THE CORNISH LOVERS

AFTER the mind has been employed on contemplations suitable to its greatness, it is unnatural to run into sudden mirth or levity; but we must let the soul subside, as it rose, by proper degrees. My late considerations of the ancient heroes impressed a certain gravity upon my mind, which is much above the little gratifications received from starts of humour and fancy, and threw me into pleasing sadness. In this state of thought I have been looking at the fire, and in a pensive manner reflecting upon the great misfortunes and calamities incident to human life; among which there are none that touch so sensibly as those which befall persons who eminently love, and meet with fatal interruptions of their happiness when they least expect it. The piety of children to parents, and the affection of parents to their children, are the effects of instinct; but the affection between lovers and friends is founded on reason and choice, which has always made me think the sorrows of the latter much more to be pitied than those of the former. The contemplation of distresses of this sort softens the mind of man, and makes the heart better. It extinguishes the seed of envy and ill-will towards mankind, corrects the pride of prosperity, and beats down all that fierceness and insolence which are apt to get into the minds of the daring and fortunate.

For this reason the wise Athenians, in their theatrical performances, laid before the eyes of the people the greatest afflictions which could befall human life, and insensibly polished their tempers by such representations. Among the moderns, indeed, there has arisen a chimerical method of disposing the fortune of the persons represented, according to what they call poetical justice: and letting none be unhappy but those who deserve it. In such cases, an intelligent spectator, if he is concerned, knows he ought not to be so; and can learn nothing from such a tenderness, but that he is a weak creature, whose passions cannot follow the dictates of his understanding. It is very natural when one is got into such a way of thinking, to recollect these examples of sorrow which have made the strongest impression upon our imaginations. An instance or two of such you will give me leave to communicate.

A young gentleman and lady of ancient and honourable houses in Cornwall had from their childhood entertained for each other a generous and noble passion, which had been long opposed by their friends, by reason of the inequality of their fortunes; but their constancy to each other, and obedience to those on whom they depended, wrought so much upon their relations, that these celebrated lovers were at length joined in marriage. Soon after their nuptials, the bridegroom was obliged to go into a foreign country, to take care of a considerable fortune, which was left him by a relation, and came very opportunely to improve their moderate circumstances. They received the congratulations of all the country on this occasion; and I remember it was a common sentence in everyone's mouth, "You see how faithful love is rewarded."

He took this agreeable voyage, and sent home every post fresh accounts of his success in his affairs abroad; but at last, though he designed to return with the next ship, he lamented in his letters, that "business would detain him some time longer from home," because he would give himself the pleasure of an unexpected arrival.

The young lady, after the heat of the day, walked every evening on the sea-shore, near which she lived, with a familiar friend, her husband's kinswoman; and diverted herself with what objects they met there, or upon discourses of the future methods of life, in the happy change of their circumstances. They stood one evening on the shore together in a perfect tranquillity, observing the setting of the sun, the calm face of the deep, and the silent heaving of the waves, which gently rolled towards them, and broke at their feet; when at a distance her kinswoman saw something float on the waters, which she fancied was a chest; and with a smile told her, "she saw it first, and if it came ashore full of jewels, she had a right to it." They both fixed their eyes upon it, and entertained themselves with the subject of the wreck, the cousin still asserting her right; but promising, "if it was a prize, to give her a very rich coral for the child of which she was then big, provided she might be god-mother." Their mirth soon abated, when they observed upon the nearer approach that it was a human body. The young lady, who had a heart naturally filled with pity and compassion, made many melancholy reflections on the occasion. "Who knows," said she, "but this man may be the only hope and heir of a wealthy house; the darling of indulgent parents, who are now in impertinent mirth, and pleasing themselves with the thoughts of offering him a bride they had got ready for him? or, may he not be the master of a family that wholly depended upon his life? There may, for aught we know, be half a dozen fatherless children, and a tender wife, now exposed to poverty by his death. What pleasure might he have promised himself in the different welcome he was to have from her and them! But let us go away; it is a dreadful sight! The best office we can do, is to take care that the poor man, whoever he is, may be decently buried." She turned away, when a wave threw the carcass on the shore. The kinswoman immediately shrieked out, "Oh, my cousin!" and fell upon the ground. The unhappy wife went to help her friend, when she saw her own husband at her feet, and dropped in a swoon upon the body. An old woman, who had been the gentleman's nurse, came out about this time to call the ladies to supper, and found her child, as she always called him, dead on the shore, her mistress and kinswoman both lying dead by him. Her loud lamentations, and calling her young master to life, soon awaked the friend from her trance; but the wife was gone for ever.

When the family and neighbourhood got together round the bodies, no one asked any question, but the objects before them told the story.

Incidents of this nature are the more moving when they are drawn by persons concerned in the catastrophe, notwithstanding they are often oppressed beyond the power of giving them in a distinct light, except we gather their sorrow from their inability to speak it.

I have two original letters, written both on the same day, which are to me exquisite in their different kinds. The occasion was this. A gentleman who had courted a most agreeable young woman, and won her heart, obtained also the consent of her father, to whom she was an only child. The old man had a fancy that they should be married in the same church where he himself was, in a village in Westmoreland, and made them set out while he was laid up with the gout in London. The bridegroom took only his man, the bride her maid: they had the most agreeable journey imaginable to the place of marriage; from whence the bridegroom writ the following letter to his wife's father.

March 18, 1672.

SIR:

After a very pleasant journey hither, we are preparing for the happy hour in which I am to be your son. I assure you the bride carries it, in the eye of the vicar who married you, much beyond her mother; though he says, your open sleeves, pantaloons and shoulder-knot, made a much better show than the finical dress I am in. However, I am contented to be the second fine man this village ever saw, and shall make it very merry before night, because I shall write myself from thence.

Your most dutiful son,

T. D.

The bride gives her duty, and is as handsome as an angel. I am the happiest man breathing.

The villagers were assembling about the church, and the happy couple took a walk in a private garden. The bridegroom's man knew his master would leave the place on a sudden after the wedding, and seeing him draw his pistols the night before, took this opportunity to go into his chamber and charge them. Upon their return from the garden, they went into that room; and, after a little fond raillery on the subject of their courtship, the lover took up a pistol, which he knew he had unloaded the night before, and, presenting it to her, said, with the most graceful air, whilst she looked pleased at his agreeable flattery: "Now, madam, repent of all those cruelties you have been guilty of to me; consider, before you die, how often you have made a poor wretch freeze under your casement; you shall die, you tyrant, you shall die, with all those instruments of death and destruction about you, with that inchanting smile, those killing ringlets of your hair—" "Give fire!" said she, laughing. He did so; and shot her dead. Who can speak his condition? but he bore it so patiently as to call up his man. The poor wretch entered, and his master locked the door upon him, "Will," said he, "did you charge these pistols?" He answered, "Yes." Upon which, he shot him dead with that remaining. After this, amidst a thousand broken sobs, piercing groans, and distracted motions, he writ the following letter to the father of his dead mistress.

> SIR:
>
> I, who two hours ago told you truly I was the happiest man alive, am now the most miserable. Your daughter lies dead at my feet, killed by my hand, through a mistake of my man's charging my pistols unknown to me. Him have I murdered for it. Such is my wedding day.—I will immediately follow my wife to her grave: but, before I throw myself upon my sword, I command my distraction so far as to explain my story to you. I fear my heart will not keep together until I have stabbed it. Poor good old man!—Remember, he that killed your daughter died for it. In the article of death, I give you my thanks, and pray for you, though I dare not for myself. If it be possible, do not curse me.

LAURENCE STERNE

(1713–1768)

LAURENCE STERNE was brought up for the Church, at the suggestion of his uncle Jacques, a Precentor and Canon of York Cathedral, whose influence was such as to assure the fortune of his penniless nephew in that profession. He was ordained in 1736 and given the vicarage of Sutton-in-the-Forest. From 1760, he lived at Cotswold. In, or about, 1758 there was a battle-royal among the clerical dignitaries of York, and Sterne plumped into the fray with *A Political Romance, addressed to ——, Esq., of York*. This was the genesis of *Tristram Shandy*, which appeared in nine volumes between 1759 and 1767. Though abused by Dr. Johnson and others on moral grounds, it took the town by storm, and the author became a social lion. *A Sentimental Journey* appeared in 1768.

"A Political Romance" (often printed as "The History of a Good Warm Watch-Coat") was not published until 1769.

THE HISTORY OF A GOOD WARM WATCH-COAT

*With which the present possessor is not content to cover his own shoulders, unless he can cut out of it a petticoat for his wife, and a pair of breeches for his son.**

A Political Romance

SIR—In my last, for want of something better to write about, I told you what a world of fending and proving we have had of late in this little village † of ours, about an old cast pair of black plush breeches, ‡ which *John,* § our parish-clerk, about ten years ago, it seems, had made a promise of to one *Trim,* ‖ who is our sexton and dog-whipper.—To this you write me word that you have had more than either one or two occasions to know a great deal of the shifty behaviour of the said master *Trim*—and that you are astonished, nor can you for your soul conceive, how so worthless a fellow, and so worthless a thing into the bargain, could become the occasion of so much racket as I have represented.

Now, though you do not say expressly you could wish to hear any more about it, yet I see plainly enough I have raised your curiosity; and therefore, from the same motive that I slightly mentioned it at all in my last letter, I will in this give you a full and very circumstantial account of the whole affair.

But, before I begin, I must first set you right in one very material point, in which I have misled you, as to the true cause of all this uproar amongst us—which does not take its rise, as I then told you, from the affair of the breeches, but, on the contrary, the whole affair of the breeches has taken its rise from it.—To understand which, you must know that the first beginning of the squabble was not betwixt *John* the parish-clerk, and *Trim* the sexton, but betwixt the parson ¶ of the parish and the said master *Trim*, about an old *watch-coat*,* that had hung up many years in the church, which *Trim* had set his heart upon; and nothing would serve *Trim* but he must take it home, in order to have it converted into a *warm under-petticoat* for his wife, and a *jerkin* for himself, against winter, to which, in a plaintive tone, he most humbly begged his reverence would consent.

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* As the whole of this *jeu d'esprit* alludes to facts and circumstances confined to the city of York, it will be necessary to observe that it was occasioned by a controversy between Dr. Fountayne and Dr. Topham, in the year 1758, on a charge made by the latter against the former, of a breach of promise, in withholding from him some preferment which he had reason to expect. For the better illustration of this little satire, a few notes are added from the pamphlets which appeared while this insignificant difference was agitating York.

† York.

‡ The commissaryship of Pickering and Pocklington.

§ Dr. John Fountayne, Dean of York.

‖ Dr. Topham.

¶ Dr. Hutton, Archbishop of York.

I need not tell you, sir, who have so often felt it, that a principle of strong compassion transports a generous mind sometimes beyond what is strictly right;—the parson was within an ace of being an honourable example of this very crime—for no sooner did the distinct words—*petticoat*—*poor wife*—*warm*—*winter*, strike upon his ear—but his heart warmed—and before *Trim* had well got to the end of his petition (being a gentleman of a frank open temper) he told him he was welcome to it with all his heart and soul.—But *Trim*, says he, as you see I am but just got down to my living, and am an utter stranger to all parish matters, knowing nothing about this old watch-coat you beg of me, having never seen it in my life, and therefore cannot be a judge whether 'tis fit for such a purpose, or if it is, in truth I know not whether 'tis mine to bestow upon you or not—you must have a week or ten days' patience, till I can make some inquiries about it—and, if I find it is in my power, I tell you again, man, your wife is heartily welcome to an under-petticoat out of it, and you to a jerkin, was the thing as good again as you represent it.

It is necessary to inform you, sir, in this place, that the parson was earnestly bent to serve *Trim* in this affair, not only from the motive of generosity which I have justly ascribed to him, but likewise from another motive, and that was by making some sort of recompense for a multitude of small services which *Trim* had occasionally done, and indeed was continually doing (as he was much about the house), when his own man was out of the way.—For all these reasons together, I say, the parson of the parish intended to serve *Trim* in this matter to the utmost of his power. All that was wanting was, previously, to inquire if any one had a *claim* to it, or whether, as it had, time immemorial, hung up in the church, the taking it down might not raise a clamour in the parish. These inquiries were the things that *Trim* dreaded in his heart—he knew very well that, if the parson should but say one word to the churchwardens about it, there would be an end of the whole affair. For this, and some other reasons not necessary to be told you at present, *Trim* was for allowing no time in this matter—but, on the contrary, doubled his diligence and importunity at the vicarage-house—plagued the whole family to death—pressed his suit morning, noon, and night; and, to shorten my story, teased the poor gentleman, who was but in an ill state of health, almost out of his life about it.

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* A patent place, in the gift of the Archbishop, which had been given to Dr. Topham for his life, and which, in 1758, he solicited to have granted to one of his family after his death.

You will now wonder when I tell you that all this hurry and precipitation, on the side of master *Trim*, produced its natural effect on the side of the parson—a suspicion that all was not right at the bottom.

He was one evening sitting alone in his study, weighing and turning this doubt every way in his mind, and after an hour and a half's serious deliberation upon the affair, and running over *Trim's* behaviour throughout—he was just saying to himself—*It must be so*—when a sudden rap at the door put an end to his soliloquy, and in a few minutes to his doubts too; for a labourer in the town, who deemed himself past his fifty-second year, had been returned by the constables in the militia list—and he had come with a groat in his hand to search the parish-register for his age. The parson bid the poor fellow put the groat into his pocket, and go into the kitchen—then, shutting the study-door, and taking down the parish register—*Who knows*, says he, *but I may find something here about this self-same watch-coat?* He had scarce unclasped the book, in saying this, when he popped on the very thing he wanted, fairly wrote in the first page, pasted to the inside of one of the covers, whereon was a memorandum about the very thing in question, in these express words—Memorandum. "The great watch-coat was purchased and given, about two hundred years ago, by the lord of the manor, to this parish-church, to the sole use and behoof of the poor sextons thereof, and their successors for ever, to be worn by them respectively in winterly cold nights, in ringing *complines*, *passing bells*, &c., which the said lord of the manor had done in pity to keep the poor wretches warm, and for the good of his own soul, for which they were directed to pray, &c." *Just Heaven!* said the parson to himself, looking upwards, *what an escape have I had! Give this for an under-petticoat to* Trim's *wife? I would not have consented to such a desecration to be Primate of all* England—*nay, I would not have disturbed a single button of it for all my tithes.*

Scarce were the words out of his mouth, when in pops *Trim* with the whole subject of the exclamation under both his arms—I say under both his arms—for he had actually got it ripped and cut out ready, his own jerkin under one arm, and the petticoat under the other, in order to carry to the tailor to be made up, and had just stepped in, in high spirits, to show the parson how cleverly it had held out.

There are now many good similes subsisting in the world, but which I have time neither to recollect nor look for, which would give you a strong conception of the astonishment and honest indignation which this unexpected stroke of *Trim's* impudence impressed upon the parson's looks; let it suffice to say that it exceeded all fair description—as well as all power of resentment—except this, that *Trim* was ordered, in a stern voice, to lay the bundles down upon the table—to go about his business, and wait upon him, at his peril, the next morning at eleven precisely.—Against this hour, like a wise man, the parson had sent to desire *John*, the parish-clerk, who bore an exceeding good character, as a man of truth, and who, having moreover a pretty freehold of about eighteen pounds a year in the township, was a leading man in it; and upon the whole was such a one, of whom it might be said that he rather did honour to his office than that his office did honour to him—him he sends for, with the churchwardens, and one of the sidesmen, a grave knowing old man, to be present—for, as *Trim* had withheld the whole truth from the parson touching the watch-coat, he thought it probable he would as certainly do the same thing to others. Though this, I said, was wise, the trouble of the precaution might have been spared—because the parson's character was unblemished—and he had ever been held by the world in the estimation of a man of honour and integrity.—*Trim's* character, on the contrary, was as well known, if not in the world, at least in all the parish, to be that of a little, dirty, pimping, pettifogging, ambidextrous fellow—who neither cared what he did or said of any, provided he could get a penny by it. This might, I said, have made any precaution needless—but you must know, as the parson had in a manner but just got down to his living, he dreaded the consequences of the least ill impression on his first entrance among his parishioners, which would have disabled him from doing them the good he wished—so that out of regard to his flock, more than the necessary care due to himself—he was resolved not to lie at the mercy of what resentment might vent or malice lend an ear to.

Accordingly, the whole matter was rehearsed, from first to last, by the parson, in the manner I have told you, in the hearing of *John*, the parish-clerk, and in the presence of *Trim*.

Trim had little to say for himself, except "that the parson had absolutely promised to befriend him and his wife in the affair to the utmost of his power; that the watch-coat was certainly in his power, and that he might still give it him if he pleased."

To this the parson's reply was short, but strong, "that nothing was in his power to do but what he could do *honestly*—that, in giving the coat to him and his wife, he should do a manifest wrong to the next sexton, the great watch-coat being the most comfortable part of the place—that he should moreover injure the right of his own successor, who would be just so much a worse patron as the worth of the coat amounted to; and, in a word, he declared that his whole intent in promising that coat was charity to *Trim*, but *wrong* to no man—that was a reserve, he said, made in all cases of this kind: and he declared solemnly, *in verbo sacerdotis*, that this was his meaning, and was so understood by *Trim* himself.

With the weight of this truth, and the great good sense and strong reason which accompanied all the parson said on the subject—poor *Trim* was driven to his last shift—and begged he might be suffered to plead his right and title to the watch-coat, if not by *promise*, at least by *servitude*—it was well known how much he was entitled to it upon these scores: that he had blacked the parson's shoes without count, and greased his boots about fifty times—that he had run for eggs in the town upon all occasions—whetted the knives at all hours—catched his horse, and rubbed him down—that, for his wife, she had been ready upon all occasions to char for them; and neither he nor she, to the best of his remembrance, ever took a farthing, or anything beyond a mug of ale. To this account of his services, he begged leave to add those of his wishes, which, he said, had been equally great—he affirmed, and was ready, he said, to make it appear, by a number of witnesses, "he had drunk his reverence's health a thousand times (by the bye he did not add, out of the parson's own ale)—that he had not only drunk his health, but wished it, and never came to the house but asked his man kindly how he did; that in particular about half a year ago, when his reverence cut his finger in paring an apple, he went half a mile * to ask a cunning woman what was good to stanch blood, and actually returned with a cobweb in his breeches-pocket. Nay, says *Trim*, it was not a fortnight ago, when your reverence took that strong purge, that I went to the far end of the whole town to borrow you a close-stool—and came back, as the neighbours who flouted me will all bear witness, with the pan upon my head, and never thought it too much. *Trim* concluded this pathetic remonstrance with saying, "he hoped his Reverence's heart would not suffer him to requite so many faithful services by so unkind a return:—that if it was so, as he was the first, so he hoped he should be the last example of a man of his condition so treated."—This plan of *Trim's* defence, which *Trim* had put himself upon, could admit of no other reply than a general smile.—Upon the whole, let me inform you that all that could be said *pro* and *con*, on both sides, being fairly heard, it was plain that *Trim* in every part of this affair had behaved very ill—and one thing, which was never expected to be known of him, happened in the course of this debate to come out against him, namely, that he had gone and told the parson,

* "Long before anything of my patent was thought of, I not only most sincerely lamented the Archbishop's illness, but made it my business to inquire after every place and remedy that might help his Grace in his complaint."—Extract of a letter from Dr. Topham, p. 26 of *Dr. Fountayne's Answer.*

before he had ever set foot in his parish,* *John* his parish-clerk, his churchwardens, and some of the heads of the parish, were a parcel of scoundrels.—Upon the upshot, *Trim* was kick'd out of doors, and told at his peril never to come there again.

At first *Trim* huffed and bounced most terribly—swore he would get a warrant—that nothing would serve him but he would call a bye-law, and tell the whole parish how the parson had misused him; but cooling of that, as fearing the parson might possibly bind him over to his good behaviour, and, for aught he knew, might send him to the house of correction, he lets the parson alone, and to revenge himself falls foul upon the clerk, who has no more to do with the quarrel than you or I—rips up the promise of the old—cast—pair of black—plush—breeches; and raises an uproar in the town about it, notwithstanding it had slept ten years—but all this, you must know, is looked upon in no other light but as an artful stroke of generalship in *Trim* to raise a dust, and cover himself under the disgraceful chastisement he has undergone.

If your curiosity is not yet satisfied—I will now proceed to relate the *battle* of the *breeches* in the same exact manner I have done that of the watch-coat.

Be it known, then, that about ten years ago, when *John* was appointed parish-clerk of this church, this said *Trim* took no small pains to get into *John's* good graces, in order, as it afterwards appeared, to coax a promise out of him of a pair of breeches, which *John* had then by him, of black plush, not much the worse for wearing—*Trim* only begged, for God's sake, to have them bestowed upon him when *John* should think fit to cast them.

Trim was one of those kind of men who loved a bit of finery in his heart, and would rather have a tatter'd rag of a better body's than the best plain whole thing his wife could spin him.

John, who was naturally unsuspicious, made no more difficulty of promising the breeches than the parson had done in promising the greatcoat; and indeed with something less reserve—because the breeches were *John's own*, and he could give them, without wrong, to whom he thought fit.

It happened, I was going to say unluckily, but should rather say most luckily, for *Trim*, for he was the only gainer by it, that a quarrel, about some six or eight weeks after this, broke out between the *late* parson of the parish† and *John* the clerk. Somebody (and it was thought to be nobody but *Trim*) had put into the parson's head "that *John's* desk * in the church was at the least four inches higher than it should be—that the thing gave offence, and was indecorous, inasmuch as it approached too near upon a level with the parson's desk itself."—This hardship the parson complained of loudly, and told *John* one day after prayers, "he could bear it no longer—and would have it altered, and brought down as it should be." *John* made no other reply but "that the desk was not of his raising: that 'twas not one hair-breadth higher than he found it—and that as he found it so he would leave it. In short, he would neither make an encroachment, nor suffer one."—The *late* parson might have his virtues, but the leading part of his character was not *humility*—so that *John's* stiffness in this point was not likely to reconcile matters. This was *Trim's* harvest.

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* In Dr. Fountayne's Pamphlet, pages 18 and 19, Dr. Topham is charged with having assured Archbishop Hutton, before he came into the Diocese, that the Dean and Chapter of York were a set of *strange people*, and that he would find it *very difficult*, if not *impossible* to live upon good terms with them.

† Archbishop Herring.

After a friendly hint to *John* to stand his ground, away hies *Trim* to make his market at the vicarage.—What passed there I will not say, intending not to be uncharitable; so shall content myself with only guessing at it from the sudden change that appeared in *Trim's* dress for the better—for he had left his old ragged coat, hat, and wig, in the stable, and was come forth strutting across the churchyard, clad in a good charitable cast coat, large hat, and wig, which the parson had just given him.—Ho! ho! hollo! *John*, cries *Trim*, in an insolent bravo, as loud as ever he could bawl—see here, my lad, how fine I am.—The more shame for you, answered *John*, seriously—Do you think, *Trim*, says he, such finery, gained by such services, becomes you, or can wear well? Fie upon it, *Trim*, I could not have expected this from you, considering what friendship you pretended, and how kind I have ever been to you—how many shillings and sixpences I have generously lent you in your distresses.—Nay, it was but the other day that I promised you these black plush breeches I have on.—Rot your breeches, quoth *Trim* (for *Trim's* brain was half turn'd with his new finery), rot your breeches, says he—I would not take them up were they laid at my door—give them, and be d—d to you, to whom you like—I would have you to know I can have a better pair of the parson's any day in the week—*John* told him plainly, as his word had once passed him, he had a spirit above taking advantage of his insolence in giving them away to another—but, to tell him his mind freely, he thought he had got so many favours of that kind, and was so likely to get many more for the same services, of the parson, that he had better give up the breeches, with good nature, to some one who would be more thankful for them.

Here *John* mentioned *Mark Slender* † (who it seems the day before had asked *John* for them), not knowing they were under promise to *Trim*—Come, *Trim*, says he, let poor *Mark* have them—you know he has not a pair to his breech; besides, you see, he is just of my size, and they will fit to a T, whereas if I give 'em to you, look ye, they are not worth much, and besides you could not get your backside into them, if you had them, without tearing them all to pieces.—Every tittle of this was most undoubtedly true, for *Trim*, you must know, by foul-feeding, and playing the good-fellow at the parson's, was growing somewhat gross about the lower parts, if *not higher;* so that, as all *John* said upon the occasion was fact, *Trim*, with much ado, and after a hundred hums and hahs, at last, out of mere compassion to *Mark, signs,** *seals, and delivers up* ALL RIGHT, INTEREST, AND PRETENSIONS WHATSOEVER IN AND TO THE SAID BREECHES, THEREBY BINDING HIS HEIRS, EXECUTORS, ADMINISTRATORS, AND ASSIGNS, NEVER MORE TO CALL THE SAID CLAIM IN QUESTION.—All this renunciation was set forth in an ample manner, to be in pure pity to *Mark's* nakedness—but the secret was, *Trim* had an eye to, and firmly expected, in his own mind, the great green pulpit-cloth,† and old velvet cushion, which were that very year to be taken down—which, by the bye, could he have wheedled *John* a second time, as he had hoped, would have made up the loss of the breeches sevenfold.

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* This alludes to the right of appointing preachers for the vacant stalls, which Dr. Fountayne, as Dean of York, claimed against the Archbishop.

† Dr. Braithwaite.

Now you must know, this pulpit-cloth and cushion were not in *John's* gift, but in the churchwardens' ‡ &c. However, as I said above that *John* was a leading man in the parish, *Trim* knew he could help him to 'em if he would—but *John* had got a surfeit of him—so, when the pulpit-cloth, &c., were taken down, they were immediately given (*John* having a great say in it) to *William Doe,*§ who understood very well what use to make of them.

As for the old breeches, poor *Mark* lived to wear them but a short time, and they got into the possession of *Lorry Slim,*‖ an unlucky wight, by whom they are still worn—in truth, as you will guess, they are very thin by this time.

But *Lorry* has a light heart, and what recommends them to him is this, that, thin as they are, he knows that *Trim*, let him say what he will, still envies the *possessor* of them, and with all his pride would be very glad to wear them after *him.*

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* Extract of a letter from Dr. Topham to Dr. Fountayne; "As Dr. Ward has proposed to resign the jurisdiction of Pickering and Pocklington to Dr. Braithwaite, if you have not any other objection, I shall very readily give up what INTEREST arises to me in these jurisdictions from your friendship and regard." P. 5, of *Dr. Fountayne's Answer to Dr. Topham.*

† The Commissaryship of the Dean of York, and the Commissaryship of the Dean and Chapter of York.

‡ The members of the Chapter.

§ Mr. Stables.

‖ Mr. Sterne himself.

Upon this footing have these affairs slept quietly for near ten years,—and would have slept for ever, but for the unlucky kicking bout, which, as I said, has ripped this squabble up afresh; so that it was no longer ago than last week, that *Trim* met and insulted *John* in the public town-way * before a hundred people—taxed him with the promise of the old cast pair of black breeches, notwithstanding *Trim's* solemn renunciation—twitted him with the pulpit-cloth and velvet-cushion—as good as told him he was ignorant of the common duties of his clerkship; adding, very insolently, that he knew not so much as to give out a common psalm in tune.

John contented himself by giving a plain answer to every article that *Trim* had laid to his charge, and appealed to his neighbours who remembered the whole affair—and, as he knew there was never anything to be got by wrestling with a chimney-sweeper, he was going to take his leave of *Trim* for ever. But hold—the mob by this time had got round them, and their high-mightinesses insisted upon having *Trim* tried upon the spot.

Trim was accordingly tried, and, after a full hearing, was convicted a second time, and handled more roughly by one or more of them than even at the parson's.—

Trim, says one, are you not ashamed of yourself to make all this rout and disturbance in the town, and set neighbours together by the ears, about an old—worn-out—pair of cast—breeches, not worth half a crown? Is there a cast coat, or a place in the whole town, that will bring you in a shilling, but what you have snapped up like a greedy hound?

In the first place, are you not sexton and dog-whipper,† worth three pounds a year? Then you begged the churchwardens to let your wife have the washing and darning of the church-linen, which brings you in thirteen shillings and four-pence; then you have six shillings and eight-pence for oiling and winding up the clock, both paid you at Easter—the pounder's place, which is worth forty shillings a year, you have got that too—you are the bailiff, which the *late* parson got you, which brings you in forty shillings more.

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* At the Sessions dinner, where Dr. Topham charged Dr. Fountayne with the breach of his promise, in giving the Commissaryship of Pocklington and Pickering to another person.

† "In the first place, would any one imagine that Dr. Topham, who was now master of the Faculties—Commissary to the Archbishop of York—Official to the Archdeacon of York—Official to the Archdeacon of the East Riding—Official to the Archdeacon of Cleveland—Official to the peculiar jurisdiction of Howdenshire—Official to the Precentor—Official to the Chancellor of the Church of York—and Official to several of the Prebendaries thereof, could accept of so poor an addition as a Commissaryship of five guineas per annum?"—P.S. of *Dr. Fountayne's Answer to Dr. Topham.*

Besides all this, you have six pounds a year paid you quarterly for being mole-catcher to the parish. Aye, says the luckless wight above-mentioned (who was standing close by him with the plush breeches on), you are not only mole-catcher, *Trim*, but you catch STRAY CONIES too in the *dark*, and you pretend a licence for it, which, I trow, will be looked at into the next quarter-sessions.—I maintain it, I have a licence, says *Trim*, blushing as red as scarlet—I have a licence, and as I farm a warren in the next parish, I will catch conies every hour in the night.—*You catch conies!* says a toothless old woman, just passing by.

This set the mob a-laughing, and sent every man home in perfect good-humour, except *Trim*, who waddled very slowly off, with that kind of inflexible gravity only to be equalled by one animal in the creation, and surpassed by none.—I am, sir,

Yours, &c., &c.,

POSTSCRIPT

I have broke open my letter to inform you that I missed the opportunity of sending it by the messenger, who I expected would have called upon me on his return through this village to York; so it has lain a week or ten days by me—I am not sorry for the disappointment, because something has since happened in continuation of this affair, which I transmit to you all under one trouble.

When I finished the above account, I thought (as did every soul in the parish) *Trim* had met with so thorough a rebuff from *John*, the parish-clerk, and the town's-folks, all being against him, that *Trim* would be glad to be quiet, and let the matter rest.

But, it seems, it is not half an hour ago since *Trim* * sailed forth again, and, having borrowed a sow-gelder's horn, with hard-blowing he got the whole town round him, and endeavoured to raise a disturbance, and fight the whole battle over again—alleged that he had been used in the last fray worse than a dog, not by *John*, the parish-clerk, for I should not, quoth *Trim*, have valued him a rush single hands—but all the town sided with him, and twelve men in *buckram* † set upon me, all at once, and kept me at sword's point for three hours together.

Besides, quoth *Trim*, there were two misbegotten knaves in *Kendal-green*, who lay all the while in ambush in *John's* own house, and they all sixteen came upon my back, and let drive at me all together—a plague, says *Trim*, of all cowards.

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* Alluding to Dr. Topham's reply to *Dr. Fountayne's Answer*.

† In *Dr. Topham's Reply*, he asserts *that Dr. Fountayne's Answer* was *the child and offspring of many parents*, p. 1.

Trim repeated his story above a dozen times, which made some of the neighbours pity him, thinking the poor fellow crack-brain'd, and that he actually believed what he said.

After this *Trim* dropped the affair of the breeches, and began a fresh dispute about the reading-desk, which I told you had once occasioned some small dispute between the *late* parson and *John*—this reading-desk, as you will observe, was but an episode wove into the main story by the bye, for the main affair was *the battle of the breeches and the great-coat.*

However, *Trim* being at last driven out of these two citadels—he has seized hold, in his retreat, of this reading-desk, with a view, as it seems, to take shelter behind it.

I cannot say but the man has fought it out obstinately enough, and, had his cause been good, I should have really pitied him. For, when he was driven out of the *great watch-coat*, you see he did not run away; no—he retreated behind the breeches, and when he could make nothing of it behind the breeches, he got behind the reading-desk. To what other hold *Trim* will next retreat, the politicians of this village are not agreed. Some think his next move will be towards the rear of the parson's boot; but as it is thought he cannot make a long stand there, others are of opinion that *Trim* will once more in his life get hold of the parson's horse, and charge upon him, or perhaps behind him; but as the horse is not easy to be caught, the more general opinion is that, when he is driven out of the reading-desk, he will make his last retreat in such a manner as, if possible, to gain the *close-stool*, and defend himself behind it to the very last drop.

If *Trim* should make this movement, by my advice he should be left, beside his citadel, in full possession of the field of battle, where 'tis certain he will keep everybody a league off, and may hop by himself till he is weary. Besides, as *Trim* seems bent upon *purging* himself, and may have abundance of foul humours to work off, I think he cannot be better placed.

But this is all matter of speculation—let me carry you back to matter of fact, and tell you what kind of stand *Trim* has actually made behind the said desk: "Neighbours and townsmen all, I will be sworn before my Lord Mayor, that *John* and his nineteen men in *buckram* have abused me worse than a dog, for they told you that I played fast and go loose with the *late* parson and him in that of theirs about the *reading-desk*, and that I made matters worse between them, and not better."

Of this charge *Trim* declared he was as innocent as the child that was unborn—that he would be book-sworn he had no hand in it.

He produced a strong witness, and moreover insinuated that *John* himself, instead of being angry for what he had done in it, had actually thanked him.—Aye, *Trim*, says the wight in the plush breeches, but that was, *Trim*, the day before *John* found thee out. Besides, *Trim*, there is nothing in that, for the very year that you was made town's pounder, thou knowest well that I both thanked thee myself, and moreover gave thee a good warm supper for turning *John Lund's* cows and horses out of my hard corn close, which if thou hadst not done (as thou toldst me), I should have lost my whole crop; whereas *John Lund* and *Thomas Patt*, who are both here to testify, and are both willing to take their oaths on't, that thou thyself wast the very man who set the gate open—and after all, it was not thee, *Trim*, 'twas the blacksmith's poor lad who turned them out—so that a man may be thanked and rewarded too for a good turn which he never did, nor ever did intend.

Trim could not sustain this unexpected stroke—so *Trim* marched off the field without colours flying, or his horn sounding, or any other ensigns of honour whatever.—Whether after this *Trim* intends to rally a second time—or whether he may not take it into his head to claim the victory—none but *Trim* himself can inform you.

However, the general opinion upon the whole is this, that in three several pitched battles *Trim* has been so *trimm'd* as never disastrous hero was *trimm'd* before.

TOBIAS SMOLLETT

(1721–1771)

TOBIAS GEORGE SMOLLETT was born near Dumbarton, and was destined for medicine. He did, indeed, qualify, and served for a while as a ship's doctor. Later he practised as a surgeon in London, and presently set up unsuccessfully at Bath. In 1748 he published his first novel, *Roderick Random*, and this was so well received that he followed it with *Peregrine Pickle* (1751) and other works. *Humphrey Clinker* did not appear until 1771. He did an enormous amount of miscellaneous writing, the best of which are a *History of England* (1757) and *Travels through France and Italy* (1766). He was from the beginning of his literary career regarded as one of the greatest novelists of his day.

"Commodore Trunnion's Wedding Day" is reprinted from *Peregrine Pickle*.

COMMODORE TRUNNION'S WEDDING DAY

THE fame of this extraordinary conjunction [of Commodore Trunnion and Mrs. Grizzle] spread all over the county; and on the day appointed for their spousals, the church was surrounded by an inconceivable multitude. The Commodore, to give a specimen of his gallantry, by the advice of his friend Hatchway, resolved to appear on horseback on the grand occasion, at the head of all his male attendants, whom he had rigged with the white shirts and black caps formerly belonging to his barge's crew; and he bought a couple of hunters for the accommodation of himself and his lieutenant. With this equipage, then, he set out from the garrison for the church, after having dispatched a messenger to apprise the bride that he and his company were mounted. She got immediately into the coach, accompanied by her brother and his wife, and drove directly to the place of assignation, where several pews were demolished, and divers persons almost pressed to death, by the eagerness of the crowd that broke in to see the ceremony performed. Thus arrived at altar, and the priest in attendance, they waited a whole half hour for the Commodore, at whose slowness they began to be under some apprehension, and accordingly dismissed a servant to quicken his pace. The valet having rode something more than a mile, espied the whole troop disposed in a long field, crossing the road obliquely, and headed by the bridegroom and his friend Hatchway, who, finding himself hindered by a hedge from proceeding farther in the same direction, fired a pistol, and stood over to the other side, making an obtuse angle with the line of his former course; and the rest of the squadron followed his example, keeping always in the rear of each other, like a flight of wild geese.

Surprised at this strange method of journeying, the messenger came up, and told the Commodore that his lady and her company expected him in the church, where they had tarried a considerable time, and were beginning to be very uneasy at his delay; and therefore desired he would proceed with more expedition. To this message Mr. Trunnion replied, "Hark ye, brother, don't you see we make all possible speed? go back and tell those who sent you, that the wind has shifted since we weighed anchor, and that we are obliged to make very short trips in tacking, by reason of the narrowness of the channel; and that, as we lie within six points of the wind, they must make some allowance for variation and leeway."—"Lord, sir!" said the valet, "what occasion have you to go zigzag in that manner? Do but clap spurs to your horses, and ride straight forward, and I'll engage you shall be at the church porch in less than a quarter of an hour."—"What! right in the wind's eye?" answered the commander, "ahey! brother, where did you learn your navigation? Hawser Trunnion is not to be taught at this time of day how to lie his course, or keep his own reckoning. And as for you, brother, you best know the trim of your own frigate." The courier finding he had to do with people who would not be easily persuaded out of their own opinions, returned to the temple, and made a report of what he had seen and heard, to the no small consolation of the bride, who had begun to discover some signs of disquiet. Composed, however, by this piece of intelligence, she exerted her patience for the space of another half hour, during which period seeing no bridegroom arrive, she was exceedingly alarmed; so that all the spectators could easily perceive her perturbation, which manifested itself in frequent palpitations, heart-heavings, and alterations of countenance, in spite of the assistance of a smelling-bottle which she incessantly applied to her nostrils.

Various were the conjectures of the company on this occasion: some imagined he had mistaken the place of rendezvous, as he had never been at church since he first settled in that parish; others believed he had met with some accident, in consequence of which his attendants had carried him back to his own house; and a third set, in which the bride herself was thought to be comprehended, could not help suspecting that the Commodore had changed his mind. But all these suppositions, ingenious as they were, happened to be wide of the true cause that detained him, which was no other than this.—The Commodore and his crew had, by dint of turning, almost weathered the parson's house that stood to windward of the church, when the notes of a pack of hounds unluckily reached the ears of the two hunters which Trunnion and the Lieutenant bestrode. These fleet animals no sooner heard the enlivening sound, than, eager for the chase, they sprung away all of a sudden, and strained every nerve to partake of the sport, flew across the fields with incredible speed, overleaped hedges and ditches, and everything in their way, without the least regard to their unfortunate riders. The Lieutenant, whose steed had got the heels of the other, finding it would be great folly and presumption in him to pretend to keep the saddle with his wooden leg, very wisely took the opportunity of throwing himself off in his passage through a field of rich clover, among which he lay at his ease; and seeing his captain advancing at full gallop, hailed him with the salutation of "What cheer? ho!" The Commodore, who was in infinite distress, eyeing him askance, as he passed, replied with a faltering voice, "O damn ye! you are safe at an anchor; I wish to God I were as fast moored." Nevertheless, conscious of his disabled heel, he would not venture to try the experiment which had succeeded so well with Hatchway, but resolved to stick as close as possible to his horse's back, until Providence should interpose in his behalf. With this view he dropped his whip, and with his right hand laid fast hold on the pummel, contracting every muscle in his body to secure himself in the seat, and grinning most formidably, in consequence of this exertion. In this attitude he was hurried on a considerable way, when all of a sudden his view was comforted by a five-bar gate that appeared before him, as he never doubted that there the career of his hunter must necessarily end. But, alas! he reckoned without his host: Far from halting at this obstruction, the horse sprung over it with amazing agility, to the utter confusion and disorder of his owner, who lost his hat and periwig in the leap, and now began to think in good earnest, that he was actually mounted on the back of the devil. He recommended himself to God, his reflection forsook him, his eye-sight of all his other senses failed, he quitted the reins, and, fastening by instinct on the mane, was in this condition conveyed into the midst of the sportsmen, who were astonished at the sight of such an apparition. Neither was their surprise to be wondered at, if we reflect on the figure that presented itself to their view. The Commodore's person was at all times an object of admiration; much more so on this occasion, when every singularity was aggravated by the circumstances of his dress and disaster.

He had put on in honour of his nuptials his best coat of blue broad cloth, cut by a tailor of Ramsgate, and trimmed with five dozen of brass buttons, large and small; his breeches were of the same piece, fastened at the knees with large bunches of tape; his waistcoat was of red plush lapelled with green velvet, and garnished with vellum holes; his boots bore an infinite resemblance, both in colour and shape, to a pair of leather buckets; his shoulder was graced with a broad buff belt, from whence depended a huge hanger with a hilt like that of a backsword; and on each side of his pummel appeared a rusty pistol rammed in a case covered with a bearskin. The loss of his tie-periwig and laced hat, which were curiosities of the kind, did not at all contribute to the improvement of the picture, but, on the contrary, by exhibiting his bald pate, and the natural extension of his lantern jaws, added to the peculiarity and extravagance of the whole. Such a spectacle could not have failed of diverting the whole company from the chase, had his horse thought proper to pursue a different route, but the beast was too keen a sporter to choose any other way than that which the stag followed; and, therefore, without stopping to gratify the curiosity of the spectators, he in a few minutes outstripped every hunter in the field. There being a deep hollow way betwixt him and the hounds, rather than ride round about the length of a furlong to a path that crossed the lane, he transported himself at one jump, to the unspeakable astonishment and terror of a wagoner who chanced to be underneath, and saw this phenomenon fly over his carriage. This was not the only adventure he achieved. The stag having taken a deep river that lay in his way, every man directed his course to a bridge in the neighbourhood; but our bridegroom's courser, despising all such conveniences, plunged into the stream without hesitation, and swam in a twinkling to the opposite shore. This sudden immersion into an element of which Trunnion was properly a native, in all probability helped to recruit the exhausted spirits of his rider, who, at his landing on the other side, gave some tokens of sensation, by hollowing aloud for assistance, which he could not possibly receive, because his horse still maintained the advantage he had gained, and would not allow himself to be overtaken.

In short, after a long chase that lasted several hours, and extended to a dozen miles at least, he was the first in at the death of the deer, being seconded by the Lieutenant's gelding, which, actuated by the same spirit, had, without a rider, followed his companion's example.

Our bridegroom finding himself at last brought up, or, in other words, at the end of his career, took the opportunity of this first pause, to desire the huntsmen would lend him a hand in dismounting; and was by their condescension safely placed on the grass, where he sat staring at the company as they came in, with such wildness of astonishment in his looks, as if he had been a creature of another species, dropped among them from the clouds.

Before they had fleshed the hounds, however, he recollected himself, and seeing one of the sportsmen take a small flask out of his pocket and apply it to his mouth, judged the cordial to be no other than neat cognac, which it really was; and expressing a desire of participation, was immediately accommodated with a moderate dose, which perfectly completed his recovery.

By this time he and his two horses had engrossed the attention of the whole crowd. While some admired the elegant proportion and uncommon spirit of the two animals, the rest contemplated the surprising appearance of their master, whom before they had only seen *en passant;* and at length, one of the gentlemen accosting him very courteously, signified his wonder at seeing him in such an equipage, and asked if he had not dropped his companion by the way.—"Why, look ye, brother," replied the Commodore, "mayhap you think me an odd sort of fellow, seeing me in this trim, especially as I have lost part of my rigging; but this here is the case, d'ye see: I weighed anchor from my own house this morning at ten A.M., with fair weather, and a favourable breeze at south-south-east, being bound to the next church on the voyage of matrimony; but howsomever, we had not run down a quarter of a league, when the wind shifting, blowed directly in our teeth; so that we were forced to tack all the way, d'ye see, and had almost beat up within sight of the port, when these sons of bitches of horses, which I had bought but two days before (for my own part, I believe they are devils incarnate), luffed round in a trice, and then refusing the helm, drove away like lightning with me and my lieutenant, who soon came to anchor in an exceeding good berth. As for my own part, I have been carried over rocks, and flats, and quicksands; among which I have pitched away a special good tie-periwig, and an iron bound hat; and, at last, thank God! am got into smooth water and safe riding; but if ever I venture my carcass upon such a hare'um scare'um blood of a bitch again, my name is not Hawser Trunnion, damn my eyes!"

One of the company, struck with this name, which he had often heard, immediately laid hold on his declaration at the close of this singular account; and observing that his horses were very vicious, asked how he intended to return? "As for that matter," replied Mr. Trunnion, "I am resolved to hire a sledge or wagon, or such a thing as a jackass; for I'll be damn'd if ever I cross the back of a horse again."—"And what do you propose to do with these creatures?" said the other, pointing to the hunters. "They seem to have some mettle; but then they are mere colts, and will take the devil and all of breaking. Methinks this hinder one is shoulder-slipped."—"Damn them," cried the Commodore, "I wish both their necks were broke, though the two cost me forty good yellowboys."—"Forty guineas!" exclaimed the stranger, who was a squire and a jockey, as well as owner of the pack. "Lord! Lord! how a man may be imposed upon! Why, these cattle are clumsy enough to go to plough; mind what a flat counter; do but observe how sharp this here one is in the withers; then he's fired in the further fetlock." In short, this connoisseur in horse-flesh, having discovered in them all the defects which can possibly be found in that species of animals, offered to give him ten guineas for the two, saying he would convert them into beasts of burden. The owner, who, after what had happened, was very well disposed to listen to anything that was said to their prejudice, implicitly believed the truth of the stranger's asseverations, discharged a furious volley of oaths against the rascal who had taken him in, and forthwith struck a bargain with the squire, who paid him instantly for his purchase; in consequence of which he won the plate at the next Canterbury races.

This affair being transacted to the mutual satisfaction of both parties, as well as to the general entertainment of the company, who laughed in their sleeves at the dexterity of their friend, Trunnion was set upon the squire's own horse, and led by his servant in the midst of this cavalcade, which proceeded to a neighbouring village, where they had bespoke dinner, and where our bridegroom found means to provide himself with another hat and wig. With regard to his marriage, he bore his disappointment with the temper of a philosopher; and the exercise he had undergone having quickened his appetite, sat down at table in the midst of his new acquaintances, making a very hearty meal, and moistening every morsel with a draught of ale, which he found very much to his satisfaction.

OLIVER GOLDSMITH

(1728–1774)

OLIVER GOLDSMITH, second son of an Irish clergyman, entered Trinity College, Dublin, in 1744, and graduated in 1749. An unsettled period followed until 1752 when he went to Edinburgh to study medicine. A period of travel on the Continent during the years 1755–6 followed, during which he is said to have taken his medical degree at Louvain or Padua. Returning to England, he reached London in a condition of destitution. After more unsettled years, and a few trial flights at writing, he had the good fortune to meet with Dr. Johnson in 1761, to whose encouragement his continuance in literature is due. Johnson sold *The Vicar of Wakefield* for him, the proceeds of which saved him from arrest for debt. Thus encouraged, he continued to turn out a great quantity of work, among the best of which must be included his stage comedies, *The Good-Natured Man* (1768), *She Stoops to Conquer* (1773), and his poems, *The Deserted Village* (1770), and *Retaliation* (1774). His remains lie buried in the church of the Temple.

"Asem" is reprinted from *Essays.*

ASEM

An Eastern Tale

WHERE Tauris lifts its head above the storm, and presents nothing to the sight of the distant traveller but a prospect of nodding rocks, falling torrents, and all the variety of tremendous nature; on the bleak bosom of this frightful mountain, secluded from society, and detesting the ways of men, lived Asem the Man-Hater.

Asem had spent his youth with men, had shared in their amusements, and had been taught to love his fellow-creatures with the most ardent affection; but, from the tenderness of his disposition, he exhausted all his fortune in relieving the wants of the distressed. The petitioner never sued in vain; the weary traveller never passed his door; he only desisted from doing good when he had no longer the power of relieving.

For a fortune thus spent in benevolence he expected a grateful return from those he had formerly relieved, and made his application with confidence of redress: the ungrateful world soon grew weary of his importunity; for pity is but a short-lived passion. He soon, therefore, began to view mankind in a very different light from that in which he had before beheld them: he perceived a thousand vices he had never before suspected to exist; wherever he turned, ingratitude, dissimulation, and treachery, contributed to increase his detestation of them. Resolved, therefore, to continue no longer in a world which he hated, and which repaid his detestation with contempt, he retired to this region of sterility, in order to brood over his resentment in solitude, and converse with the only honest heart he knew—namely, with his own.

A cave was his only shelter from the inclemency of the weather; fruits, gathered with difficulty from the mountain's side, his only food; and his drink was fetched, with danger and toil, from the headlong torrent. In this manner he lived, sequestered from society, passing the hours in meditation, and sometimes exulting that he was able to live independent of his fellow-creatures.

At the foot of the mountain an extensive lake displayed its glassy bosom, reflecting on its broad surface the impending horrors of the mountain. To this capacious mirror he would sometimes descend, and, reclining on its steep banks, cast an eager look on the smooth expanse that lay before him. "How beautiful," he often cried, "is Nature! how lovely even in her wildest scenes! How finely contrasted is the level plain that lies beneath me with yon awful pile that hides its tremendous head in clouds! But the beauty of these scenes is no way comparable with their utility; hence an hundred rivers are supplied, which distribute health and verdure to the various countries through which they flow. Every part of the universe is beautiful, just, and wise; but man, vile man, is a solecism in nature, the only monster in the creation. Tempests and whirlwinds have their use; but vicious, ungrateful, man is a blot in the fair page of universal beauty. Why was I born of that detested species, whose vices are almost a reproach to the wisdom of the divine Creator? Were men entirely free from vice, all would be uniformity, harmony, and order. A world of moral rectitude should be the result of a perfect moral agent. Why, why then, O Alla! must I be thus confined in darkness, doubt, and despair?"

Just as he uttered the word despair, he was going to plunge into the lake beneath him, at once to satisfy his doubts, and put a period to his anxiety, when he perceived a most majestic being walking on the surface of the water, and approaching the bank on which he stood. So unexpected an object at once checked his purpose; he stopped, contemplated, and fancied he saw something awful and divine in his aspect.

"Son of Adam," cried the Genius, "stop thy rash purpose; the Father of the Faithful has seen thy justice, thy integrity, thy miseries, and hath sent me to afford and administer relief. Give me thine hand, and follow without trembling wherever I shall lead: in me behold the Genius of Conviction, kept by the great Prophet, to turn from their errors those who go astray, not from curiosity, but a rectitude of intention. Follow me and be wise."

Asem immediately descended upon the lake, and his guide conducted him along the surface of the water, till, coming near the centre of the lake, they both began to sink; the waters closed over their heads; they descended several hundred fathoms, till Asem, just ready to give up his life as inevitably lost, found himself, with his celestial guide, in another world, at the bottom of the waters, where human foot had never trod before. His astonishment was beyond description, when he saw a sun like that he had left, a serene sky over his head, and blooming verdure under his feet.

"I plainly perceive your amazement," said the Genius; "but suspend it for a while. This world was formed by Alla, at the request, and under the inspection, of our great Prophet, who once entertained the same doubts which filled your mind when I found you, and from the consequence of which you were so lately rescued. The rational inhabitants of this world are formed agreeable to your own ideas; they are absolutely without vice. In other respects it resembles your earth, but differs from it in being wholly inhabited by men who never do wrong. If you find this world more agreeable than that you so lately left, you have free permission to spend the remainder of your days in it; but permit me for some time to attend you, that I may silence your doubts, and make you better acquainted with your company and your new habitation."

"A world without vice! Rational beings without immorality!" cried Asem, in a rapture; "I thank thee, O Alla! who hast at length heard my petitions: this, this indeed will produce happiness, ecstasy, and ease. Oh, for an immortality, to spend it among men who are incapable of ingratitude, injustice, fraud, violence, and a thousand other crimes that render society miserable!"

"Cease thine exclamations," replied the Genius. "Look around thee: reflect on every object and action before us, and communicate to me the result of thine observations. Lead wherever you think proper, I shall be your attendant and instructor." Asem and his companion travelled on in silence for some time, the former being entirely lost in astonishment; but at last recovering his former serenity, he could not help observing, that the face of the country bore a near resemblance to that he had left, except that this subterranean world still seemed to retain its primeval wildness.

"Here," cried Asem, "I perceive animals of prey and others that seem only designed for their subsistence; it is the very same in the world over our heads. But had I been permitted to instruct our Prophet, I would have removed this defect, and formed no voracious or destructive animals, which only prey on the other parts of the creation."

—"Your tenderness for inferior animals is, I find, remarkable," said the Genius, smiling. "But, with regard to meaner creatures, this world exactly resembles the other, and, indeed, for obvious reasons; for the earth can support a more considerable number of animals by their thus becoming food for each other, than if they had lived entirely on her vegetable productions. So that animals of different natures thus formed, instead of lessening their multitude, subsist in the greatest number possible. But let us hasten on to the inhabited country before us, and see what that offers for instruction."

They soon gained the utmost verge of the forest, and entered the country inhabited by men without vice; and Asem anticipated in idea the rational delight he hoped to experience in such an innocent society. But they had scarcely left the confines of the wood, when they beheld one of the inhabitants flying with hasty steps, and terror in his countenance, from an army of squirrels, that closely pursued him. "Heavens!" cried Asem, "why does he fly? What can he fear from animals so contemptible?" He had scarcely spoken, when he perceived two dogs pursuing another of the human species, who with equal terror and haste attempted to avoid them. "This," cried Asem to his guide, "is truly surprising; nor can I conceive the reason for so strange an action."—"Every species of animals," replied the Genius, "has of late grown very powerful in this country; for the inhabitants, at first, thinking it unjust to use either fraud or force in destroying them, they have insensibly increased, and now frequently ravage their harmless frontiers."—"But they should have been destroyed," cried Asem; "you see the consequence of such neglect."—"Where is, then, that tenderness you so lately expressed for subordinate animals?" replied the Genius, smiling; "you seem to have forgot that branch of justice."—"I must acknowledge my mistake," returned Asem; "I am now convinced that we must be guilty of tyranny and injustice to the brute creation, if we would enjoy the world ourselves. But let us no longer observe the duty of man to these irrational creatures, but survey their connections with one another."

As they walked farther up the country, the more he was surprised to see no vestiges of handsome houses, no cities, nor any mark of elegant design. His conductor, perceiving his surprise, observed, that the inhabitants of this new world were perfectly content with their ancient simplicity; each had a house, which, though homely, was sufficient to lodge his little family; they were too good to build houses, which could only increase their own pride, and the envy of the spectator: what they built was for convenience, and not for show. "At least, then," said Asem, "they have neither architects, painters, nor statuaries, in their society; but these are idle arts, and may be spared. However, before I spend much more time here, you should have my thanks for introducing me into the society of some of their wisest men: there is scarce any pleasure to me equal to a refined conversation; there is nothing of which I am so much enamoured as wisdom."—"Wisdom!" replied his instructor; "how ridiculous! We have no wisdom here, for we have no occasion for it; true wisdom is only a knowledge of our own duty, and the duty of others to us; but of what use is such wisdom here? each intuitively performs what is right in himself, and expects the same from others. If by wisdom you should mean vain curiosity and empty speculation, as such pleasures have their origin in vanity, luxury, or avarice, we are too good to pursue them."—"All this may be right," says Asem: "but methinks I observe a solitary disposition prevail among the people; each family keeps separately within their own precincts, without society, or without intercourse."—"That indeed, is true," replied the other; "here is no established society, nor should there be any; all societies are made either through fear or friendship: the people we are among are too good to fear each other; and there are no motives to private friendship, where all are equally meritorious."—"Well, then," said the sceptic, "as I am to spend my time here, if I am to have neither the polite arts, nor wisdom, nor friendship, in such a world, I should be glad at least of an easy companion, who may tell me his thoughts, and to whom I may communicate mine."—"And to what purpose should either do this?" says the Genius: "flattery or curiosity are vicious motives, and never allowed of here; and wisdom is out of the question."

"Still, however," said Asem, "the inhabitants must be happy; each is contented with his own possessions, nor avariciously endeavours to heap up more than is necessary for his own subsistence; each has therefore leisure for pitying those that stand in need of his compassion." He had scarce spoken, when his ears were assaulted with the lamentations of a wretch who sat by the way-side, and in the most deplorable distress seemed gently to murmur at his own misery. Asem immediately ran to his relief, and found him in the last stage of a consumption. "Strange," cried the son of Adam, "that men who are free from vice should thus suffer so much misery without relief!"—"Be not surprised," said the wretch who was dying: "would it not be the utmost injustice for beings who have only just sufficient to support themselves, and are content with a bare subsistence, to take it from their own mouths to put it into mine? They never are possessed of a single meal more than is necessary, and what is barely necessary cannot be dispensed with."—"They should have been supplied with more than is necessary," cried Asem—"and yet I contradict my own opinion but a moment before—all is doubt, perplexity, and confusion. Even the want of ingratitude is no virtue here, since they never received a favour. They have, however, another excellence yet behind; the love of their country is still, I hope, one of their darling virtues."—"Peace, Asem," replied the Guardian, with a countenance not less severe than beautiful; "nor forfeit all thy pretensions to wisdom: the same selfish motives by which we prefer our own interests to that of others, induce us to regard our country preferably to that of another. Nothing less than universal benevolence is free from vice, and that you see is practised here."—"Strange!" cries the disappointed pilgrim, in an agony of distress; "what sort of a world am I now introduced to? There is scarce a single virtue, but that of temperance, which they practise: and in that they are no way superior to the very brute creation. There is scarce an amusement which they enjoy; fortitude, liberality, friendship, wisdom, conversation, and love of country, all are virtues entirely unknown here: thus it seems that to be unacquainted with vice is not to know virtue. Take me, O my Genius, back to that very world which I have despised: a world which has Alla for its contriver is much more wisely formed than that which has been projected by Mahomet. Ingratitude, contempt, and hatred, I can now suffer, for perhaps I have deserved them. When I arraigned the wisdom of Providence, I only showed my own ignorance; henceforth let me keep from vice myself, and pity it in others."

He had scarce ended, when the Genius, assuming an air of terrible complacency, called all his thunders around him, and vanished in a whirlwind. Asem, astonished at the terror of the scene, looked for his imaginary world; when, casting his eyes around, he perceived himself in the very situation, and in the very place, where he first began to repine and despair; his right foot had been just advanced to take the fatal plunge, nor had it been yet withdrawn; so instantly did Providence strike the series of truths just imprinted on his soul. He now departed from the water-side in tranquillity; and leaving his horrid mansion, travelled to Segestan, his native city, where he diligently applied himself to commerce, and put in practice that wisdom he had learned in solitude. The frugality of a few years soon produced opulence; the number of his domestics increased; his friends came to him from every part of the city; nor did he receive them with disdain; and a youth of misery was concluded with an old age of elegance, affluence, and ease.

MARY WOLLSTONECRAFT

(1759–1797)

MARY WOLLSTONECRAFT, with her sister Eliza, kept a "dame's school" at Newington Green, London, Mary subsequently becoming governess at Lord Kingsborough's from 1787 to 1788. Her next employment, for a period of five years, was with a London publisher named Johnson. Between 1793 and 1795 she formed a connexion in Paris with Gilbert Imlay, and attempted to drown herself in consequence of his unfaithfulness. This episode, however, did not prevent her from marrying William Godwin the elder in 1797. Her *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters* appeared in 1787, *Original Stories from Real Life* in 1788, and her *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* in 1791. She was an advanced and ardent feminist. Despite her own moral turpitude, her stories are the quintessence of the "point the moral and adorn the tale" school of writing, and there is a mincing sententiousness about their manner that cannot fail to amuse the modern taste.

"Crazy Robin" is reprinted from *Original Stories.*

CRAZY ROBIN

IN the afternoon the children bounded over the short grass of the common, and walked under the shadow of the mountain till they came to a craggy part; where a stream broke out, and ran down the declivity, struggling with the huge stones which impeded its progress, and occasioned a noise that did not unpleasantly interrupt the solemn silence of the place. The brook was soon lost in a neighbouring wood, and the children turned their eyes to the broken side of the mountain, over which ivy grew in great profusion. Mrs. Mason pointed out a little cave, and desired them to sit down on some stumps of trees, whilst she related the promised story.

"In yonder cave once lived a poor man, who generally went by the name of Crazy Robin. In his youth he was very industrious, and married my father's dairy-maid; a girl deserving of such a good husband. For some time they continued to live very comfortably; their daily labour procured their daily bread; but Robin, finding it was likely he should have a large family, borrowed a trifle, to add to the small pittance which they had saved in service, and took a little farm in a neighbouring county. I was then a child.

"Ten or twelve years after, I heard that a crazy man, who appeared very harmless, had piled by the side of the brook a great number of stones; he would wade into the river for them, followed by a cur dog, whom he would frequently call his Jacky, and even his Nancy; and then mumble to himself—thou wilt not leave me—we will dwell with the owls in the ivy.—A number of owls had taken shelter in it. The stones which he waded for he carried to the mouth of the hole, and only just left room enough to creep in. Some of the neighbours at last recollected his face; and I sent to inquire what misfortune had reduced him to such a deplorable state.

"The information I received from different persons, I will communicate to you in as few words as I can.

"Several of his children died in their infancy; and, two years before he came to his native place, one misfortune had followed another till he had sunk under their accumulated weight. Through various accidents he was long in arrears to his landlord; who, seeing that he was an honest man, who endeavoured to bring up his family, did not distress him;. but when his wife was lying-in of her last child, the landlord dying, his heir sent and seized the stock for the rent; and the person from whom he had borrowed some money, exasperated to see all gone, arresting him immediately, he was hurried to jail, without being able to leave any money for his family. The poor woman could not see them starve, and trying to support her children before she had gained sufficient strength, she caught cold; and through neglect, and her want of proper nourishment, her illness turned to a putrid fever; which two of the children caught from her, and died with her. The two who were left, Jacky and Nancy, went to their father, and took with them a cur dog, that had long shared their frugal meals.

"The children begged in the day, and at night slept with their wretched father. Poverty and dirt soon robbed their cheeks of the roses which the country air made bloom with a peculiar freshness; so that they soon caught a jail fever—and died. The poor father, who was now bereft of all his children, hung over their bed in speechless anguish; not a groan or a tear escaped from him, whilst he stood, two or three hours, in the same attitude, looking at the dead bodies of his little darlings. The dog licked his hands, and strove to attract his attention; but for awhile he seemed not to observe his caresses; when he did, he said, mournfully, thou wilt not leave me—and then he began to laugh. The bodies were removed; and he remained in an unsettled state, often frantic; at length the frenzy subsided, and he grew melancholy and harmless. He was not then so closely watched; and one day he contrived to make his escape, the dog followed him, and came directly to his native village.

"After I had received this account, I determined he should live in the place he had chosen, undisturbed. I sent some conveniences, all of which he rejected, except a mat; on which he sometimes slept—the dog always did. I tried to induce him to eat, but he constantly gave the dog whatever I sent him, and lived on haws and blackberries, and every kind of trash. I used to call frequently on him; and he sometimes followed me to the house I now live in, and in winter he would come of his own accord, and take a crust of bread. He gathered water-cresses out of the pool, and would bring them to me, with nosegays of wild thyme, which he plucked from the sides of the mountain. I mentioned before, that the dog was a cur. It had, indeed, the bad trick of a cur, and would run barking after horses' heels. One day, when his master was gathering water-cresses, the dog running after a young gentleman's horse, made it start, and almost threw the rider; who grew so angry, that though he knew it was the poor madman's dog, he levelled his gun at his head—shot him—and instantly rode off. Robin ran to his dog—he looked at his wounds, and not sensible that he was dead, called to him to follow him; but when he found that he could not, he took him to the pool, and washed off the blood before it began to clot, and then brought him home, and laid him on the mat.

"I observed that I had not seen him pacing up the hills as usual, and sent to inquire about him. He was found sitting by the dog, and no entreaties could prevail on him to quit the body, or receive any refreshment. I instantly set off for this place, hoping, as I had always been a favourite, that I should be able to persuade him to eat something. But when I came to him, I found the hand of death was upon him. He was still melancholy; yet there was not such a mixture of wildness in it as formerly. I pressed him to take some food; but, instead of answering me, or turning away, he burst into tears—a thing I had never seen him do before, and, sobbing, he said, Will anyone be kind to me!—you will kill me!—I saw not my wife die—No!—they dragged me from her—but I saw Jacky and Nancy die—and who pitied me?—but my dog! He turned his eyes to the body—I wept with him. He would then have taken some nourishment, but nature was exhausted—and he expired."

"Was that the cave?" said Mary. They ran to it. "Poor Robin! Did you ever hear of anything so cruel?" "Yes," answered Mrs. Mason; "and as we walk home I will relate an instance of still greater barbarity.

"I told you, that Robin was confined in a jail. In France they have a dreadful one, called the Bastille. The poor wretches who are confined in it live entirely alone; have not the pleasure of seeing men or animals; nor are they allowed books.—They live in comfortless solitude. Some have amused themselves by making figures on the wall; and others have laid straws in rows. One miserable captive found a spider; he nourished it for two or three years; it grew tame, and partook of his lonely meal. The keeper observed it, and mentioned the circumstance to a superior, who ordered him to crush it. In vain did the man beg to have his spider spared. You find, Mary, that the nasty creature which you despised was a comfort in solitude. The keeper obeyed the cruel command; and the unhappy wretch felt more pain when he heard the crush, than he had ever experienced during his long confinement. He looked round a dreary apartment, and the small portion of light which the grated bars admitted, only served to show him, that he breathed where nothing else drew breath."

SIR WALTER SCOTT

(1771–1832)

WALTER SCOTT was educated in Edinburgh at the High School and at the University, and was originally intended to follow his father's footsteps and qualify as a Writer of the Signet. Although called to the Bar, literature early claimed him. His first publication, which took place in 1799, two years after his marriage, was a translation of Bürger's *Lenore* and met with some success. His primary efforts in composition took the form of verse, of which the best known are *The Lay of the Last Minstrel* (1805) and *Marmion* (1808). Becoming secretly a partner in Ballantyne's printing business, Scott entered upon the composition of that long line of historical tales and novels with which his name will always be associated. He also, during this period, assisted in a scheme for starting the *Quarterly Review* (1808–9). After a long period of success, he became involved in acute financial difficulties, and only by herculean labour was he able to maintain himself. Upon his death the balance of debt was paid off with sums realised on the security of his copyrights. Among his best-known tales and novels are *Waverley* (1814), *Rob Roy* (1817), and *The Heart of Midlothian* (1818). Scott was created a baronet in 1820, and in the same year was made president of the Royal Society of Scotland. He died at his home at Abbotsford, after suffering severely from apoplexy and paralysis.

THE TAPESTRIED CHAMBER

THE following narrative is given from the pen, so far as memory permits, in the same character in which it was presented to the author's ear; nor has he claim to further praise, or to be more deeply censured, than in proportion to the good or bad judgment which he has employed in selecting his materials, as he has studiously avoided any attempt at ornament which might interfere with the simplicity of the tale.

At the same time it must be admitted, that the particular class of stories which turns on the marvellous, possesses a stronger influence when told, than when committed to print. The volume taken up at noonday, though rehearsing the same incidents, conveys a much more feeble impression, than is achieved by the voice of the speaker on a circle of fireside auditors, who hang upon the narrative as the narrator details the minute incidents which serve to give it authenticity, and lowers his voice with an affectation of mystery while he approaches the fearful and wonderful part. It was with such advantages that the present writer heard the following events related, more than twenty years since, by the celebrated Miss Seward, of Litchfield, who, to her numerous accomplishments, added, in a remarkable degree, the power of narrative in private conversation. In its present form the tale must necessarily lose all the interest which was attached to it, by the flexible voice and intelligent features of the gifted narrator. Yet still, read aloud, to an undoubting audience by the doubtful light of the closing evening, or, in silence, by a decaying taper, and amidst the solitude of a half-lighted apartment, it may redeem its character as a good ghost story. Miss Seward always affirmed that she had derived her information from an authentic source, although she suppressed the names of the two persons chiefly concerned. I will not avail myself of any particulars I may have since received concerning the localities of the detail, but suffer them to rest under the same general description in which they were first related to me; and, for the same reason, I will not add to, or diminish the narrative, by any circumstance, whether more or less material, but simply rehearse, as I heard it, a story of supernatural terror.

About the end of the American War, when the officers of Lord Cornwallis's army, which surrendered at Yorktown, and others, who had been made prisoners during the impolitic and ill-fated controversy, were returning to their own country, to relate their adventures, and repose themselves after their fatigues, there was amongst them a general officer, to whom Miss S. gave the name of Browne, but merely, as I understood, to save the inconvenience of introducing a nameless agent in the narrative. He was an officer of merit, as well as a gentleman of high consideration for family and attainments.

Some business had carried General Browne upon a tour through the western counties, when, in the conclusion of a morning stage, he found himself in the vicinity of a small country town, which presented a scene of uncommon beauty, and of a character peculiarly English.

The little town, with its stately old church, whose tower bore testimony to the devotion of ages long past, lay amidst pastures and cornfields of small extent, but bounded and divided with hedgerow timber of great age and size. There were few marks of modern improvement. The environs of the place intimated neither the solitude of decay, nor the bustle of novelty; the houses were old, but in good repair; and the beautiful little river murmured freely on its way to the left of the town, neither restrained by a dam, nor bordered by a towing-path.

Upon a gentle eminence, nearly a mile to the southward of the town, were seen, amongst many venerable oaks and tangled thickets, the turrets of a castle, as old as the wars of York and Lancaster, but which seemed to have received important alterations during the age of Elizabeth and her successor. It had not been a place of great size; but whatever accommodation it formerly afforded, was, it must be supposed, still to be obtained within its walls; at least, such was the inference which General Browne drew from observing the smoke arise merrily from several of the ancient wreathed and carved chimney-stalks. The wall of the park ran alongside of the highway for two or three hundred yards; and through the different points by which the eye found glimpses into the woodland scenery, it seemed to be well stocked. Other points of view opened in succession; now a full one, of the front of the old castle, and now a side glimpse at its particular towers; the former rich in all the bizarrerie of the Elizabethan school, while the simple and solid strength of other parts of the building seemed to show that they had been raised more for defence than ostentation.

Delighted with the partial glimpses which he obtained of the castle through the woods and glades by which this ancient feudal fortress was surrounded, our military traveller was determined to inquire whether it might not deserve a nearer view, and whether it contained family pictures or other objects of curiosity worthy of a stranger's visit; when, leaving the vicinity of the park, he rolled through a clean and well-paved street, and stopped at the door of a well-frequented inn.

Before ordering horses to proceed on his journey, General Browne made inquiries concerning the proprietor of the château which had so attracted his admiration; and was equally surprised and pleased at hearing in reply a nobleman named, whom we shall call Lord Woodville. How fortunate! Much of Browne's early recollections, both at school and at college, had been connected with young Woodville, whom, by a few questions, he now ascertained to be the same with the owner of this fair domain. He had been raised to the peerage by the decease of his father a few months before, and, as the General learned from the landlord, the term of mourning being ended, was now taking possession of his paternal estate, in the jovial season of merry autumn, accompanied by a select party of friends to enjoy the sports of a country famous for game.

This was delightful news to our traveller. Frank Woodville had been Richard Browne's fag at Eton, and his chosen intimate at Christ Church; their pleasures and their tasks had been the same; and the honest soldier's heart warmed to find his early friend in possession of so delightful a residence, and of an estate, as the landlord assured him with a nod and a wink, fully adequate to maintain and add to his dignity. Nothing was more natural than that the traveller should suspend a journey, which there was nothing to render hurried, to pay a visit to an old friend under such agreeable circumstances.

The fresh horses, therefore, had only the brief task of conveying the General's travelling carriage to Woodville Castle. A porter admitted them at a modern Gothic lodge, built in that style to correspond with the castle itself, and at the same time rang a bell to give warning of the approach of visitors. Apparently the sound of the bell had suspended the separation of the company, bent on the various amusements of the morning; for, on entering the court of the château, several young men were lounging about in their sporting dresses, looking at, and criticising, the dogs which the keepers held in readiness to attend their pastime. As General Browne alighted, the young lord came to the gate of the hall, and for an instant gazed, as at a stranger, upon the countenance of his friend, on which war, with its fatigues and its wounds, had made a great alteration. But the uncertainty lasted no longer than till the visitor had spoken, and the hearty greeting which followed was such as can only be exchanged betwixt those who have passed together the merry days of careless boyhood or early youth.

"If I could have formed a wish, my dear Browne," said Lord Woodville, "it would have been to have you here, of all men, upon this occasion, which my friends are good enough to hold as a sort of holiday. Do not think you have been unwatched during the years you have been absent from us. I have traced you through your dangers, your triumphs, your misfortunes, and was delighted to see that, whether in victory or defeat, the name of my old friend was always distinguished with applause."

The General made a suitable reply, and congratulated his friend on his new dignities, and the possession of a place and domain so beautiful.

"Nay, you have seen nothing of it as yet," said Lord Woodville, "and I trust you do not mean to leave us till you are better acquainted with it. It is true, I confess, that my present party is pretty large, and the old house, like other places of the kind, does not possess so much accommodation as the extent of the outward walls appears to promise. But we can give you a comfortable old-fashioned room, and I venture to suppose that your campaigns have taught you to be glad of worse quarters."

The General shrugged his shoulders, and laughed. "I presume," he said, "the worst apartment in your château is considerably superior to the old tobacco-cask, in which I was fain to take up my night's lodging when I was in the Bush, as the Virginians call it, with the light corps. There I lay, like Diogenes himself, so delighted with my covering from the elements, that I made a vain attempt to have it rolled on to my next quarters; but my commander for the time would give way to no such luxurious provision, and I took farewell of my beloved cask with tears in my eyes."

"Well, then, since you do not fear your quarters," said Lord Woodville, "you will stay with me a week at least. Of guns, dogs, fishing-rods, flies, and means of sport by sea and land, we have enough and to spare: you cannot pitch on an amusement but we will find the means of pursuing it. But if you prefer the gun and pointers, I will go with you myself, and see whether you have mended your shooting since you have been amongst the Indians of the back settlements."

The General gladly accepted his friendly host's proposal in all its points. After a morning of manly exercise, the company met at dinner, where it was the delight of Lord Woodville to conduce to the display of the high properties of his recovered friend, so as to recommend him to his guests, most of whom were persons of distinction. He led General Browne to speak of the scenes he had witnessed; and as every word marked alike the brave officer and the sensible man, who retained possession of his cool judgment under the most imminent dangers, the company looked upon the soldier with general respect, as on one who had proved himself possessed of an uncommon portion of personal courage; that attribute, of all others, of which everybody desires to be thought possessed.

The day at Woodville Castle ended as usual in such mansions. The hospitality stopped within the limits of good order; music, in which the young lord was a proficient, succeeded to the circulation of the bottle; cards and billiards, for those who preferred such amusements, were in readiness; but the exercise of the morning required early hours, and not long after eleven o'clock the guests began to retire to their several apartments.

The young lord himself conducted his friend, General Browne, to the chamber destined for him, which answered the description he had given of it, being comfortable, but old-fashioned. The bed was of the massive form used in the end of the seventeenth century, and the curtains of faded silk, heavily trimmed with tarnished gold. But then the sheets, pillows, and blankets looked delightful to the campaigner, when he thought of his "mansion, the cask." There was an air of gloom in the tapestry hangings, which, with their worn-out graces, curtained the walls of the little chamber, and gently undulated as the autumnal breeze found its way through the ancient lattice-window, which pattered and whistled as the air gained entrance. The toilet, too, with its mirror, turbaned, after the manner of the beginning of the century, with a coiffure of murrey-coloured silk, and its hundred strange-shaped boxes, providing for arrangements which had been obsolete for more than fifty years, had an antique, and in so far a melancholy, aspect. But nothing could blaze more brightly and cheerfully than the two large wax candles; or if aught could rival them, it was the flaming, bickering fagots in the chimney, that sent at once their gleam and their warmth through the snug apartment; which, notwithstanding the general antiquity of its appearance, was not wanting in the least convenience, that modern habits rendered either necessary or desirable.

"This is an old-fashioned sleeping apartment, General," said the young lord; "but I hope you find nothing that makes you envy your old tobacco-cask."

"I am not particular respecting my lodgings," replied the General; "yet were I to make any choice, I would prefer this chamber by many degrees, to the gayer and more modern rooms of your family mansion. Believe me, that when I unite its modern air of comfort with its venerable antiquity, and recollect that it is your lordship's property, I shall feel in better quarters here, than if I were in the best hotel London could afford."

"I trust—I have no doubt—that you will find yourself as comfortable as I wish you, my dear General," said the young nobleman; and once more bidding his guest good-night, he shook him by the hand, and withdrew.

The General once more looked round him, and internally congratulating himself on his return to peaceful life, the comforts of which were endeared by the recollection of the hardships and dangers he had lately sustained, undressed himself, and prepared for a luxurious night's rest.

Here, contrary to the custom of this species of tale, we leave the General in possession of his apartment until the next morning.

The company assembled for breakfast at an early hour, but without the appearance of General Browne, who seemed the guest that Lord Woodville was desirous of honouring above all whom his hospitality had assembled around him. He more than once expressed himself surprised at the General's absence, and at length sent a servant to make inquiry after him. The man brought back information that General Browne had been walking abroad since an early hour of the morning, in defiance of the weather, which was misty and ungenial.

"The custom of a soldier," said the young nobleman to his friends; "many of them acquire habitual vigilance, and cannot sleep after the early hour at which their duty usually commands them to be alert."

Yet the explanation which Lord Woodville thus offered to the company seemed hardly satisfactory to his own mind, and it was in a fit of silence and abstraction that he awaited the return of the General. It took place near an hour after the breakfast bell had rung. He looked fatigued and feverish. His hair, the powdering and arrangement of which was at this time one of the most important occupations of a man's whole day, and marked his fashion as much as, in the present time, the tying of a cravat, or the want of one, was dishevelled, uncurled, void of powder, and dank with dew. His clothes were huddled on with a careless negligence, remarkable in a military man, whose real or supposed duties are usually held to include some attention to the toilet; and his looks were haggard and ghastly in a peculiar degree.

"So you have stolen a march upon us this morning, my dear General," said Lord Woodville; "or you have not found your bed so much to your mind as I had hoped and you seemed to expect. How did you rest last night?"

"Oh, excellently well! Remarkably well! Never better in my life," said General Browne rapidly, and yet with an air of embarrassment which was obvious to his friend. He then hastily swallowed a cup of tea, and, neglecting or refusing whatever else was offered, seemed to fall into a fit of abstraction.

"You will take the gun to-day, General?" said his friend and host, but had to repeat the question twice ere he received the abrupt answer, "No, my lord; I am sorry I cannot have the opportunity of spending another day with your lordship: my post horses are ordered, and will be here directly."

All who were present showed surprise, and Lord Woodville immediately replied, "Post horses, my good friend! What can you possibly want with them, when you promised to stay with me quietly for at least a week?"

"I believe," said the General, obviously much embarrassed, "that I might, in the pleasure of my first meeting with your lordship, have said something about stopping here a few days; but I have since found it altogether impossible."

"That is very extraordinary," answered the young nobleman. "You seemed quite disengaged yesterday, and you cannot have had a summons to-day; for our post has not come up from the town and therefore you cannot have received any letters."

General Browne, without giving any further explanation, muttered something about indispensable business, and insisted on the absolute necessity of his departure in a manner which silenced all opposition on the part of his host, who saw that his resolution was taken, and forbore all further importunity.

"At least, however," he said, "permit me, my dear Browne, since go you will or must, to show you the view from the terrace, which the mist, that is now rising, will soon display."

He threw open a sash-window, and stepped down upon the terrace as he spoke. The General followed him mechanically, but seemed little to attend to what his host was saying, as, looking across an extended and rich prospect, he pointed out the different objects worthy of observation. Thus they moved on till Lord Woodville had attained his purpose of drawing his guest entirely apart from the rest of the company, when, turning round upon him with an air of great solemnity, he addressed him thus:

"Richard Browne, my old and very dear friend, we are now alone. Let me conjure you to answer me, upon the word of a friend, and the honour of a soldier. How did you in reality rest during last night?"

"Most wretchedly indeed, my lord," answered the General, in the same tone of solemnity; "so miserably that I would not run the risk of such a second night, not only for all the lands belonging to this castle, but for all the country which I see from this elevated point of view."

"This is most extraordinary," said the young lord, as if speaking to himself; "then there must be something in the reports concerning that apartment." Again turning to the General, he said, "For God's sake, my dear friend, be candid with me, and let me know the disagreeable particulars which have befallen you under a roof, where, with consent of the owner, you should have met nothing save comfort."

The General seemed distressed by this appeal, and paused a moment before he replied. "My dear lord," he at length said, "what happened to me last night is of a nature so peculiar and so unpleasant, that I could hardly bring myself to detail it even to your lordship, were it not that, independent of my wish to gratify any request of yours, I think that sincerity on my part may lead to some explanation about a circumstance equally painful and mysterious. To others, the communication I am about to make, might place me in the light of a weak-minded, superstitious fool, who suffered his own imagination to delude and bewilder him; but you have known me in childhood and youth, and will not suspect me of having adopted in manhood the feelings and frailties from which my early years were free." Here he paused, and his friend replied:

"Do not doubt my perfect confidence in the truth of your communication, however strange it may be," replied Lord Woodville; "I know your firmness of disposition too well, to suspect you could be made the object of imposition, and am aware that your honour and your friendship will equally deter you from exaggerating whatever you may have witnessed."

"Well, then," said the General, "I will proceed with my story as well as I can, relying upon your candour; and yet distinctly feeling that I would rather face a battery than recall to my mind the odious recollections of last night."

He paused a second time, and then perceiving that Lord Woodville remained silent and in an attitude of attention, he commenced, though not without obvious reluctance, the history of his night adventures in the Tapestried Chamber.

"I undressed and went to bed, so soon as your lordship left me yesterday evening; but the wood in the chimney, which nearly fronted my bed, blazed brightly and cheerfully, and, aided by a hundred exciting recollections of my childhood and youth, which had been recalled by the unexpected pleasure of meeting your lordship, prevented me from falling immediately asleep. I ought, however, to say, that these reflections were all of a pleasant and agreeable kind, grounded on a sense of having for a time exchanged the labour, fatigues, and dangers of my profession, for the enjoyments of a peaceful life, and the reunion of those friendly and affectionate ties, which I had torn asunder at the rude summons of war.

"While such pleasing reflections were stealing over my mind, and gradually lulling me to slumber, I was suddenly aroused by a sound like that of the rustling of a silken gown, and the tapping of a pair of high-heeled shoes, as if a woman were walking in the apartment. Ere I could draw the curtain to see what the matter was, the figure of a little woman passed between the bed and the fire. The back of this form was turned to me, and I could observe, from the shoulders and neck, it was that of an old woman, whose dress was an old-fashioned gown, which, I think, ladies call a sacque; that is, a sort of robe completely loose in the body, but gathered into broad plaits upon the neck and shoulders, which fall down to the ground, and terminate in a species of train.

"I thought the intrusion singular enough, but never harboured for a moment the idea that what I saw was anything more than the mortal form of some old woman about the establishment, who had a fancy to dress like her grandmother, and who, having perhaps (as your lordship mentioned that you were rather straitened for room) been dislodged from her chamber for my accommodation, had forgotten the circumstance, and returned by twelve to her old haunt. Under this persuasion I moved myself in bed and coughed a little, to make the intruder sensible of my being in possession of the premises. She turned slowly round, but, gracious heaven! my lord, what a countenance did she display to me! There was no longer any question what she was, or any thought of her being a living being. Upon a face which wore the fixed features of a corpse, were imprinted the traces of the vilest and most hideous passions which had animated her while she lived. The body of some atrocious criminal seemed to have been given up from the grave, and the soul restored from the penal fire, in order to form, for a space, an union with the ancient accomplice of its guilt. I started up in bed, and sat upright, supporting myself on my palms, as I gazed on this horrible spectre. The hag made, as it seemed, a single and swift stride to the bed where I lay, and squatted herself down upon it, in precisely the same attitude which I had assumed in the extremity of horror, advancing her diabolical countenance within half a yard of mine, with a grin which seemed to intimate the malice and the derision of an incarnate fiend."

Here General Browne stopped, and wiped from his brow the cold perspiration with which the recollection of his horrible vision had covered it.

"My lord," he said, "I am no coward. I have been in all the mortal dangers incidental to my profession, and I may truly boast, that no man ever knew Richard Browne dishonour the sword he wears; but in these horrible circumstances, under the eyes, and, as it seemed, almost in the grasp of an incarnation of an evil spirit, all firmness forsook me, all manhood melted from me like wax in the furnace, and I felt my hair individually bristle. The current of my life-blood ceased to flow, and I sank back in a swoon, as very a victim to panic terror as ever was a village girl, or a child of ten years old. How long I lay in this condition I cannot pretend to guess.

"But I was roused by the castle clock striking one, so loud that it seemed as if it were in the very room. It was some time before I dared open my eyes, lest they should again encounter the horrible spectacle. When, however, I summoned courage to look up, she was no longer visible. My first idea was to pull my bell, wake the servants, and remove to a garret or a hay-loft, to be ensured against a second visitation. Nay, I will confess the truth, that my resolution was altered, not by the shame of exposing myself, but by the fear that, as the bell-cord hung by the chimney, I might, in making my way to it, be again crossed by the fiendish hag, who, I figured to myself, might be still lurking about some corner of the apartment.

"I will not pretend to describe what hot and cold fever-fits tormented me for the rest of the night, through broken sleep, weary vigils, and that dubious state which forms the neutral ground between them. An hundred terrible objects appeared to haunt me; but there was the great difference betwixt the vision which I have described, and those which followed, that I knew the last to be deceptions of my own fancy and over-excited nerves.

"Day at last appeared, and I rose from my bed ill in health, and humiliated in mind. I was ashamed of myself as a man and a soldier, and still more so, at feeling my own extreme desire to escape from the haunted apartment, which, however, conquered all other considerations; so that, huddling on my clothes with the most careless haste, I made my escape from your lordship's mansion, to seek in the open air some relief to my nervous system, shaken as it was by this horrible rencounter with a visitant, for such I must believe her, from the other world. Your lordship has now heard the cause of my discomposure, and of my sudden desire to leave your hospitable castle. In other places I trust we may often meet; but God protect me from ever spending a second night under that roof!"

Strange as the General's tale was, he spoke with such a deep air of conviction, that it cut short all the usual commentaries which are made on such stories. Lord Woodville never once asked him if he was sure he did not dream of the apparition, or suggested any of the possibilities by which it is fashionable to explain supernatural appearances, as wild vagaries of the fancy, or deceptions of the optic nerves. On the contrary, he seemed deeply impressed with the truth and reality of what he had heard; and, after a considerable pause, regretted, with much appearance of sincerity, that his early friend should in his house have suffered so severely.

"I am the more sorry for your pain, my dear Browne," he continued, "that it is the unhappy, though most unexpected, result of an experiment of my own. You must know, that for my father and grandfather's time, at least, the apartment which was assigned to you last night, had been shut on account of reports that it was disturbed by supernatural sights and noises. When I came, a few weeks since, into possession of the estate, I thought the accommodation, which the castle afforded for my friends, was not extensive enough to permit the inhabitants of the invisible world to retain possession of a comfortable sleeping apartment. I therefore caused the Tapestried Chamber, as we call it, to be opened; and, without destroying its air of antiquity, I had such new articles of furniture placed in it as became the modern times. Yet as the opinion that the room was haunted very strongly prevailed among the domestics, and was also known in the neighbourhood and to many of my friends, I feared some prejudice might be entertained by the first occupant of the Tapestried Chamber, which might tend to revive the evil report which it had laboured under, and so disappoint my purpose of rendering it an useful part of the house. I must confess, my dear Browne, that your arrival yesterday, agreeable to me for a thousand reasons besides, seemed the most favourable opportunity of removing the unpleasant rumours which attached to the room, since your courage was indubitable, and your mind free of any preoccupation on the subject. I could not, therefore, have chosen a more fitting subject for my experiment."

"Upon my life," said General Browne, somewhat hastily, "I am infinitely obliged to your lordship—very particularly indebted indeed. I am likely to remember for some time the consequences of the experiment, as your lordship is pleased to call it."

"Nay, now you are unjust, my dear friend," said Lord Woodville. "You have only to reflect for a single moment, in order to be convinced that I could not augur the possibility of the pain to which you have been so unhappily exposed. I was yesterday morning a complete sceptic on the subject of supernatural appearances. Nay, I am sure that had I told you what was said about that room, those very reports would have induced you, by your own choice, to select it for your accommodation. It was my misfortune, perhaps my error, but really cannot be termed my fault, that you have been afflicted so strangely."

"Strangely indeed!" said the General, resuming his good temper; "and I acknowledge that I have no right to be offended with your lordship for treating me like what I used to think myself—a man of some firmness and courage. But I see my post horses are arrived, and I must not detain your lordship from your amusement."

"Nay, my old friend," said Lord Woodville, "since you cannot stay with us another day, which, indeed, I can no longer urge, give me at least half an hour more. You used to love pictures, and I have a gallery of portraits, some of them by Vandyke, representing ancestry to whom this property and castle formerly belonged. I think that several of them will strike you as possessing merit."

General Browne accepted the invitation, though somewhat unwillingly. It was evident he was not to breathe freely or at ease till he left Woodville Castle far behind him. He could not refuse his friend's invitation, however; and the less so, that he was a little ashamed of the peevishness which he had displayed towards his well-meaning entertainer.

The General, therefore, followed Lord Woodville through several rooms, into a long gallery hung with pictures, which the latter pointed out to his guest, telling the names, and giving some account of the personages whose portraits presented themselves in progression. General Browne was but little interested in the details which these accounts conveyed to him. They were, indeed, of the kind which are usually found in an old family gallery. Here, was a cavalier who had ruined the estate in the royal cause; there, a fine lady who had reinstated it by contracting a match with a wealthy Roundhead. There, hung a gallant who had been in danger for corresponding with the exiled Court at Saint Germain's; here, one who had taken arms for William at the Revolution; and there, a third that had thrown his weight alternately into the scale of whig and tory.

While Lord Woodville was cramming these words into his guest's ear, "against the stomach of his sense," they gained the middle of the gallery, when he beheld General Browne suddenly start, and assume an attitude of the utmost surprise, not unmixed with fear, as his eyes were caught and suddenly riveted by a portrait of an old lady in a sacque, the fashionable dress of the end of the seventeenth century.

"There she is!" he exclaimed; "there she is, in form and features, though inferior in demoniac expression to the accursed hag who visited me last night!"

"If that be the case," said the young nobleman, "there can remain no longer any doubt of the horrible reality of your apparition. That is the picture of a wretched ancestress of mine, of whose crimes a black and fearful catalogue is recorded in a family history in my charter-chest. The recital of them would be too horrible; it is enough to say, that in yon fatal apartment incest and unnatural murder were committed. I will restore it to the solitude to which the better judgment of those who preceded me had consigned it; and never shall anyone, so long as I can prevent it, be exposed to a repetition of the supernatural horrors which could shake such courage as yours."

Thus the friends, who had met with such glee, parted in a very different mood; Lord Woodville to command the Tapestried Chambed to be unmantled, and the door built up; and General Browne to seek in some less beautiful country, and with some less dignified friend, forgetfulness of the painful night which he had passed in Woodville Castle.

CHARLES LAMB

(1775–1834)

CHARLES LAMB was born in Crown Office Row, in the Temple, the son of John Lamb, barrister's clerk. Nominated to Christ's Hospital, he proceeded there in 1782 and remained until 1789, when he became a clerk at the South Sea House. In 1792 he transferred his energies to the Accountants' Office of the East India Company, wherein he occupied a desk until 1825, in which year he retired. Despite an unhappy, almost tragic, private life, he preserved an equability and serenity of spirit which his work most faithfully reflects. His best-known works consist of the *Essays of Elia*, which first appeared in the *London Magazine* in 1820, and the *Letters*, although short stories, adaptations, and poems flowed with equal freedom from his nimble pen.

"Arabella Hardy" is reprinted from *Mrs. Leicester's School*.

ARABELLA HARDY

I WAS born in the East Indies. I lost my father and mother young. At the age of five, my relations thought it proper that I should be sent to England for my education. I was to be intrusted to the care of a young woman who had a character for great humanity and discretion; but just as I had taken leave of my friends, and we were about to take our passage, the young woman suddenly fell sick, and could not go on board. In this unpleasant emergency no one knew how to act. The ship was at the very point of sailing, and it was the last which was to sail for the season. At length the captain, who was known to my friends, prevailed upon my relation, who had come with us to see us embark, to leave the young woman on shore, and to let me embark separately. There was no possibility of getting any other female attendant for me in the short time allotted for our preparation; and the opportunity of going by that ship was thought too valuable to be lost. No other ladies happened to be going; and so I was consigned to the care of the captain and his crew—rough and unaccustomed attendants for a young creature, delicately brought up as I had been: but indeed they did their best to make me not feel the difference. The unpolished sailors were my nursery-maids and my waiting-women. Everything was done by the captain and the men to accommodate me and make me easy. I had a little room made out of the cabin, which was to be considered as my room, and nobody might enter into it. The first mate had a great character for bravery and all sailor-like accomplishments; but with all this he had a gentleness of manners, and a pale, feminine cast of face, from ill health and a weakly constitution, which subjected him to some ridicule from the officers, and caused him to be named Betsy. He did not much like the appellation; but he submitted to it the better, saying that those who gave him a woman's name well knew that he had a man's heart, and that, in the face of danger, he would go as far as any man. To this young man, whose real name was Charles Atkinson, by a lucky thought of the captain, the care of me was especially intrusted. Betsy was proud of his charge; and, to do him justice, acquitted himself with great diligence and adroitness through the whole of the voyage. From the beginning I had somehow looked upon Betsy as a woman, hearing him so spoken of; and this reconciled me in some measure to the want of a maid, which I had been used to. But I was a manageable girl at all times, and gave nobody much trouble.

I have not knowledge enough to give an account of my voyage, or to remember the names of the seas we passed through, or the lands which we touched upon, in our course. The chief thing I can remember (for I do not recollect the events of the voyage in any order) was Atkinson taking me upon deck to see the great whales playing about in the sea. There was one great whale came bounding up out of the sea, and then he would dive into it again, and then he would come up at a distance where nobody expected him; and another whale was following after him. Atkinson said they were at play, and that the lesser whale loved that bigger whale, and kept it company all through the wide seas: but I thought it strange play, and a frightful kind of love; for I every minute expected they would come up to our ship and toss it. But Atkinson said a whale was a gentle creature, and it was a sort of sea elephant: and that the most powerful creatures in nature are always the least hurtful. And he told me how men went out to take these whales, and stuck long pointed darts into them; and how the sea was discoloured with the blood of these poor whales for many miles' distance: and I admired the courage of the men; but I was sorry for the inoffensive whale. Many other pretty sights he used to show me, when he was not on watch, or doing some duty for the ship. No one was more attentive to his duty than he: but at such times as he had leisure he would show me all pretty sea sights—the dolphins and porpoises that came before a storm; and all the colours which the sea changed to—how sometimes it was a deep blue, and then a deep green, and sometimes it would seem all on fire. All these various appearances he would show me, and attempt to explain the reason of them to me as well as my young capacity would admit of. There was a lion and a tiger on board, going to England as a present to the king; and it was a great diversion to Atkinson and me, after I had got rid of my first terrors, to see the ways of these beasts in their dens, and how venturous the sailors were in putting their hands through the grates, and patting their rough coats. Some of the men had monkeys, which ran loose about; and the sport was for the men to lose them, and find them again. The monkeys would run up the shrouds, and pass from rope to rope, with ten times greater alacrity than the most experienced sailor could follow them: and sometimes they would hide themselves in the most unthought-of places; and when they were found they would grin, and make mouths, as if they had sense. Atkinson described to me the ways of these little animals in their native woods; for he had seen them. Oh, how many ways he thought of to amuse me in that long voyage!

Sometimes he would describe to me the odd shapes and varieties of fishes that were in the sea, and tell me tales of the sea-monsters that lay hid at the bottom, and were seldom seen by men, and what a glorious sight it would be if our eyes could be sharpened to behold all the inhabitants of the sea at once, swimming in the great deeps, as plain as we see the gold and silver fish in a bowl of glass. With such notions he enlarged my infant capacity to take in many things.

When in foul weather I have been terrified at the motion of the vessel as it rocked backwards and forwards, he would still my fears, and tell me that I used to be rocked so once in a cradle, and that the sea was God's bed and the ship our cradle, and we were as safe in that greater motion as when we felt that lesser one in our little wooden sleeping-places.

When the wind was up, and sang through the sails, and disturbed me with its violent clamours, he would call it music, and bid me hark to the sea-organ; and with that name he quieted my tender apprehensions. When I have looked around with a mournful face at seeing all *men* about me, he would enter into my thoughts, and tell me pretty stories of his mother and his sisters, and a female cousin that he loved better than his sisters, whom he called Jenny; and say that when we got to England I should go and see them; and how fond Jenny would be of his little daughter, as he called me. And with these images of women and females which he raised in my fancy, he quieted me for a while. One time, and never but once, he told me that Jenny had promised to be his wife, if ever he came to England; but that he had his doubts whether he should live to get home, for he was very sickly. This made me cry bitterly.

That I dwell so long upon the attention of this Atkinson, is only because his death, which happened just before we got to England, affected me so much, that he alone of all the ship's crew has engrossed my mind ever since; though, indeed, the captain and all were singularly kind to me, and strove to make up for my uneasy and unnatural situation. The boatswain would pipe for my diversion, and the sailor-boy would climb the dangerous mast for my sport. The rough foremast-man would never willingly appear before me till he had combed his long black hair smooth and sleek, not to terrify me. The officers got up a sort of play for my amusement; and Atkinson, or as they called him, Betsy, acted the heroine of the piece. All ways that could be contrived were thought upon to reconcile me to my lot. I was the universal favourite; I do not know how deservedly; but I suppose it was because I was alone, and there was no female in the ship besides me. Had I come over with female relations or attendants, I should have excited no particular curiosity: I should have required no uncommon attentions. I was one little woman among a crew of men; and I believe the homage which I have read that men universally pay to women was in this case directed to me, in the absence of all other womankind. I do not know how that might be; but I was a little princess among them, and I was not six years old.

I remember, the first drawback which happened to my comfort was Atkinson's not appearing the whole of one day. The captain tried to reconcile me to it by saying that Mr. Atkinson was confined to his cabin; that he was not quite well, but a day or two would restore him. I begged to be taken in to see him; but this was not granted. A day, and then another, came, and another, and no Atkinson was visible; and I saw apparent solicitude on the faces of all the officers, who nevertheless strove to put on their best countenances before me, and to be more than usually kind to me. At length, by the desire of Atkinson himself, as I have since learned, I was permitted to go into his cabin, and see him. He was sitting up, apparently in a state of great exhaustion; but his face lighted up when he saw me; and he kissed me, and told me that he was going a great voyage, far longer than that which we had passed together, and he should never come back. And though I was so young, I understood well enough that he meant this of his death; and I cried sadly: but he comforted me, and told me that I must be his little executrix, and perform his last will, and bear his last words to his mother and his sisters, and to his cousin

Jenny, whom I should see in a short time; and he gave me his blessing, as a father would bless his child; and he sent a last kiss by me to all his female relations; and he made me promise that I would go and see them when I got to England. And soon after this he died; but I was in another part of the ship when he died; and I was not told it till we got to shore, which was a few days after; but they kept telling me that he was better and better, and that I should soon see him, but that it disturbed him to talk with any one. Oh, what a grief it was when I learned that I had lost an old shipmate, that had made an irksome situation so bearable by his kind assiduities! and to think that he was gone, and that I could never repay him for his kindness!

When I had been a year and a half in England, the captain, who had made another voyage to India and back, thinking that time had alleviated a little the sorrow of Atkinson's relations, prevailed upon my friends, who had the care of me in England, to let him introduce me to Atkinson's mother and sisters. Jenny was no more. She had died in the interval, and I never saw her. Grief for his death had brought on a consumption, of which she lingered about a twelvemonth, and then expired. But in the mother and the sisters of this excellent young man I have found the most valuable friends I possess on this side the great ocean. They received me from the captain as the little *protégée* of Atkinson: and from them I have learned passages of his former life; and this in particular—that the illness of which he died was brought on by a wound, of which he never quite recovered, which he got in a desperate attempt, when he was quite a boy, to defend his captain against a superior force of the enemy which had boarded him, and which, by his premature valour inspiriting the men, they finally succeeded in repulsing. This was that Atkinson, who, from his pale and feminine appearance, was called Betsy: this was he whose womanly care of me got him the name of a woman; who, with more than female attention, condescended to play the handmaid to a little unaccompanied orphan, that fortune had cast upon the care of a rough sea-captain and his rougher crew.

M. G. LEWIS

(1775–1818)

MATTHEW GREGORY (popularly known as "Monk") LEWIS was educated at Westminster and Christ Church, Oxford. At the age of nineteen he became attaché to the British Embassy at the Hague, which was his sole incursion into diplomacy. Literature had attracted him from an early age, and in the summer of 1795 he published *Ambrosio, or, The Monk*, which was an enormous public success. He was now famous—he had always had ample means—and he entered the House of Commons in 1796 and sat as member for six years. He wrote plays and verses—his *Castle Spectre* was produced at Drury Lane (1798) under Sheridan's management; but social life attracted him now more than his pen, and though his output was considerable, the work was as a rule of indifferent quality.

"My Uncle's Garret Window" is reprinted from *The Romancist and Novelist's Library.*

MY UNCLE'S GARRET WINDOW

With silent steps I'll follow you all day.
—DRYDEN.

MY uncle was a genius and a poet—of course, he was as poor as David's rat, and lived in a garret. He was a kind-hearted man, and I loved him too sincerely to hesitate at putting my neck in jeopardy once a day by climbing the crazy ladder, which afforded the only means of reaching his celestial abode. Yet after my taking all this trouble it frequently happened that I found my uncle too busy with the Muses to bestow any of his attention on so insignificant an animal as his nephew. On these occasions he contented himself with shaking me by the hand in silence, laying his finger on his lip, and pointing to a joint-stool which stood close by the window; for he occupied himself the only chair in the room, and even that had but three legs to boast of: the joint-stool therefore, though not so dignified a seat, was in fact a much more secure and comfortable one.

But when I found myself established on my joint-stool, how was I to employ myself? When my uncle was seized with one of these fits of inspiration, they frequently continued for a considerable time: where then was I to find amusement during this interval? My uncle was too much an author to think anybody's works worth reading except his own; for those I happened to have no great taste, and I did not care to affront him by asking for the productions of any other brain. Reading then was out of the question; but in order that my eyes might not be quite idle, I employed them in examining what was going on in the house opposite to us. By the help of a pocket telescope I could distinctly see everything which passed in our neighbour's first and second floor; and after indulging myself for some days in these observations, I became so well acquainted with every member of this unknown family, that I felt myself as much interested about their proceedings as if I had been a member of it myself.

You will say that this systematic *espionage* was not very honourable: I allow it. But then, on the other hand, it was very entertaining; and

I am now going to bribe you to approve of my conduct, by admitting you to a partnership in my stolen knowledge.

The street which my uncle inhabited was narrow and the quarter was not one of the most fashionable: but the furniture of the house in question convinced me that its owner must certainly be a man of considerable opulence. This owner (for the sake of distinction we will call him Sempronius, for I have been too much occupied by his actions to have inquired for his real name as yet) this owner is not exactly the sort of man whom I should voluntarily have selected for the hero of my tale; but beggars must not be choosers, and I must take the good man as I find him. He seems to labour under some hypochondriacal complaint, and as he frequently suffers himself in his moments of weakness to indulge his ill-temper, I have not the least hopes of working him up into a portrait of heroic fortitude: on the other hand, I have as little hopes of his furnishing my drama with a striking character for my villain. It's true, he governs his whole family with a rod of iron, and I have already discovered that he is completely a domestic tyrant: everyone seems to feel constrained in his company: and it is only in the absence of the master of the mansion that innocent mirth ventures to show itself within its doors. Yet still I observe that, with the same unbending gravity with which he censures his wife and rates his servants, he receives every Sunday the visits of a distressed emigrant (with whose worth and whose wants accident has made me well acquainted), to whose complaints he seems to listen with unwearied patience, and whom he never suffers to depart with empty pockets. As the poor gentleman retraces his steps, I observe that his walk is firmer and lighter, and that not unfrequently a tear trembles in his eye; but he never quits the street without turning back and with clasped hands casting a look of gratitude towards the window of Sempronius's study. Sempronius then has a good heart, but a most intolerable temper. Well! well! we will hope that his ill-temper proceeds from ill-health and from increasing years, for Sempronious cannot now be far from his grand climacteric. I conclude this from the colour of his hair, which here and there age has already silvered.

I conjecture that he must be a merchant of some kind or other. What makes me think this is, that the ground floor of his house looks as if it had been converted into a magazine. Besides he is regularly absent from home exactly at 'Change hours: I am rather of opinion that he dabbles in the funds.

But how in the name of wonder could Sempronius, so little amiable as he appears to be, have obtained such a treasure as the wife whom I am now going to describe?—or rather, how came he to be so singularly fortunate as to draw two such great prizes in Hymen's lottery;

a lottery, in which (Heaven have pity on all poor Christian husbands!) there are so many blanks?—Many years ago he lost a wife . . . oh! she was worthy to have been the empress of her whole sex!—So beautiful . . . so good . . . "You have seen her then?"—(Such was my uncle's demand one day, when I was indulging myself in enthusiastic but just commendations of the lady in question)—"You have seen her then? You knew her?"—"Alas! never! I was not so fortunate."—"But you have been told of her charms and merits?"—"Not a syllable; I never heard her mentioned in my life."—"Then pray, how are you so certain, that she was so beautiful and so good?"

"Why, my dear uncle, you must know that her picture in oil hangs in the second wife's sitting-room, and never was my eye gratified by more perfect features, or a more noble countenance: and that this countenance belonged to the wife of Sempronius there can be no doubt. Sempronius himself (but much younger) is introduced in the picture; and the attitude in which the painter has represented them sufficiently marks the relation of the parties: besides, if there were no other reason for concluding that she was his wife, I should be convinced of it by the striking resemblance between her countenance and that of a young man about twenty, who appears to be our neighbour's son, and probably is the only offspring of this marriage."

"Well! sir! well! so much for her beauty and her marriage. Now sir, granting that she was a wife, what makes you suppose that she must necessarily have been a good one?"

"My dear sir, it is quite impossible that she should have been otherwise. Whenever Sempronius is displeased with his present helpmate he never fails to point to that portrait: he seems to contrast her conduct with that of the object of his reproof, and to hold her up as a model for the imitation of her whole sex; while, on the other hand, his second wife (she is reading *King Lear* at this moment, for the edition is Boydell's, and I can distinctly read the title; so we will call her Cordelia, if you please)—Cordelia then, whenever she finds her patience on the point of being shipwrecked among the numberless little domestic storms which the unhappy temper of our friend Sempronius is perpetually raising, constantly fixes her eyes on that mild heavenly countenance, and seems to ask, 'In this situation how would you have acted?' She then turns to her peevish husband with a serene look; the clouds of displeasure which were gathering on her brow have totally disappeared; she takes his hand kindly, as if imploring his pardon for having given him offence and never leaves him till her winning manners and engaging smiles have charmed away his ill-humour, as David's lyre banished the evil spirit from the bosom of the frantic Saul."

"But pray, nephew, what makes you so certain that the original of this portrait, which produces such beneficial effects, is no longer in existence?"

"Surely the presence of a second wife is a proof fully sufficient of the decease of a first."

"But there may be no second wife in the case: Cordelia may be his daughter."

"Impossible, my dearest uncle! absolutely impossible! A thousand little circumstances, the tender familiarity which exists between her and Sempronius, the authority with which she governs the whole house, the intimate yet respectful conduct of her stepson Edward (you see I make no scruple of christening my neighbours over again), the difference which Sempronius makes in his behaviour when addressing her and when addressing the said Edward. No; it is quite impossible that Cordelia should be anything but his wife. Besides, to put the matter out of all doubt, you must know that there is a little boy about eight or nine years old whose features exhibit the same mixed resemblance to Cordelia and Sempronius which Edward's exhibit to Sempronius and the lady, of whose portrait I have spoken in terms of such warm approbation."

Cordelia then is the wife of Sempronius and what a wife! Perhaps she is the only woman on earth worthy to occupy the place of her predecessor! Her whole constitution seems to be composed of gentleness and benevolence; and, in truth, it was necessary that she should be composed of such materials, in order that the vinegar of her husband's disposition might be softened down and rendered supportable by the infusion of her oil of roses. I am thoroughly instructed in her mode of life, for I can overlook the whole of her sitting-room. It joins on to her husband's study, and here she passes the greatest part of the day. Here she sits, works, writes, and reads: some of her books are now lying in the window, and even at this distance I can distinguish the names of "Shakespeare," "Cowper," and "Paley." Here it is that she settles all the affairs of her household, and from hence, as from their centre, I can see good order, diligence, and economy spread themselves forth, and pervade every department of her family. Different occupations have all their stated hours: always active, always employed, without noise, without hurry, she manages that everything should be done in its proper time and place; and the hand with which she governs the whole machine is no less light than sure and steady.

I will only mention two other points in Cordelia's character, which have struck, and which please me particularly. The one is, that in spite of her husband's lectures and frequent appeals to it she still suffers the portrait of his first wife to decorate her own private apartment. The other is, that in her endeavours to soothe her husband she never fails to be successful, and that in her presence Sempronius always seems to be less gloomy and less unruly than when he is beyond the sphere of her influence.

Her stepson is established on the second floor; his room is exactly over his father's study, and there prevails in it an air of such systematic confusion—books, letters, old pens, and inkstands lie so mingled together upon all the chairs and tables, and sheets of half-written paper full of blots and scratches are so constantly fluttering about the chamber, that I have no sort of doubt of his being a poet; not to mention a large book in a white parchment cover, which has quite the look of a common-place book, and on which he frequently writes a few lines, after biting the top of his quill for some minutes, and taking two or three turns up and down the room, accompanying his movement by vehement gesticulations. I am also convinced that his verses are generally amatory, and addressed to no imaginary object. He often copies something out of the aforesaid book with the white parchment cover, and seals it up carefully in the form of a letter, which he always gives the postman with his own hands. Besides, when he has secured his door against intruders (ah! poor lad! how little he suspects that I see everything that he is about) he frequently reads over and over again certain little notes (written on a fine shining paper with coloured edges, and very neatly folded up), and which he seldom fails to press repeatedly to his lips before he arrives at the end of them. As to the peculiarities of his temper, I observe by what passes between him and his father, and still more between him and a certain aunt who frequents the family, that his feelings are quick and susceptible, and that he easily takes offence. He is careless and rather harum-scarum, for he sometimes leaves the key in the secretaire, where all these precious *billet-doux* are deposited, and then suddenly recollecting his neglect, he flies upstairs to repair it in such a hurry, that I expect him every moment to break his neck by the way. He is benevolent for he never sees a beggar without relieving him; extravagant, for he receives his allowance monthly, and it never lasts above half the time; proud and high-minded, for having applied to his father either for an increase of allowance or an advance (I could not exactly ascertain which), and receiving a refusal in the first instance, when Sempronius sent him a banknote the next morning the youth returned it, and preferred waiting till the first of the present month. I observe, too, that he is sometimes a little out of humour without cause, in which I suppose he takes after his father: however, his ill-temper never is vented upon anything except his spaniel, whom he feeds all dinner time, and who always sleeps with his head resting upon the foot of his master.

As to his half-brother, little Willy, he is too young as yet to show much character; but I am very much mistaken if he has not a decided genius for the arts. Every morsel of paper which falls in his way is immediately covered with his inventions. If his pencil is taken from him, he hunts about till he finds a piece of coal or chalk, with which he scrawls landscapes and figures over all the doors, walls, and tables, to the great annoyance of his order-loving mother, and of the house-maid, whose wet napkin has no sort of respect for the production of this juvenile Sir Joshua. In a moment the effusions of his genius are effaced forever; but in vain does his mother scold, and in vain the house-maid scrub; he sets to work again with unabated ardour, and in defiance of these enemies of art, in a few hours the walls, doors, and tables, are as fully decorated as before.

But I must not omit the portrait of the aforementioned aunt, who, though not an inmate of the family, exercises over it no inconsiderable authority. From her likeness to Sempronius she must certainly be his sister, though evidently some years older: she is tall, thin, pale, and then such a nose and chin! She is almost a daily guest, and Sempronius never suffers himself to indulge his ill-humours in her society. Sempronius is a shrewd long-headed man, and minds the main chance; from the respect which he pays her I conclude that the old lady is in good circumstances, her own mistress, without children, and that her brother flatters himself that either he or his offspring will hold no contemptible place in her will. Nay, I am not only persuaded that she has no children, but that the venerable lady is still a votary of Diana, which conclusion I draw, not only from observations made on her person and manners, but from the extreme love and intimacy which prevails between her and a large tortoise-shell cat, which generally lies basking before Cordelia's fire.

This good lady (what shall we call her? Her brother's name is Sempronius—"Amandus he; Amanda she"—So says Sterne—Sempronia be her name then)—Sempronia then seems much attached to her brother, but Cordelia is evidently no favourite with her. She treats her with such cold and formal politeness. She so often bites her thin lips as if desirous of repressing a scornful sneer, and which she takes good care not to repress. If she opens one of the volumes placed on Cordelia's table, she never fails to slap it down hastily, with such a shrug of the shoulders and such a shake of the head, and then such a turning up of the whites of her eyes to heaven. From the latter circumstance I am tempted to believe that the good lady has been a little bit by the Methodists. However, Cordelia considers it as beneath her to take notice of these little pieces of impertinence, and only answers the sneer of contempt with which her sister-in-law occasionally favours her by a smile of the sweetest gentleness and most heavenly forbearance. As to Edward, he and his aunt are at open enmity: three minutes of conversation with her are generally sufficient to make him throw out fire and flames; then he flies out of the room, and up go the whites of her eyes more piteously than ever.

But undoubtedly her greatest favourite in the family, I mean the greatest upon two legs, is little Willy; he holds the very next place in her good graces to the tortoise-shell cat. Of this the young rogue seems conscious; and proud of enjoying that sunshine which is bestowed upon so few, he never fails to welcome her arrival by a voluntary offering of his rosy lips, and sports and frisks about her armchair as merrily and as wantonly as a butterfly flutters about a honey-pot; I warrant me the good lady is seldom unprovided with a box full of sugar-plums.

Such are the persons who compose this family, and such is the knowledge which I have obtained of them during a daily observation of several months. But lately some circumstances have occurred which have excited my curiosity respecting their concerns more than usual. I have fortunately succeeded in communicating this curiosity to my uncle's bosom; he has consented to be my amanuensis; and to-morrow (he provided with plenty of ink, pens, and paper, and myself furnished with my aforesaid pocket-telescope), it is our intention to commence an exact and systematic account of everything which passes in the house of his opposite neighbour. I am to report, and he is to register.

Having completed this introduction which was necessary to make my readers acquainted with our *dramatis personæ*, I shall proceed to my employment—Hark!—the clock strikes ten—that is the hour at which Sempronius regularly makes his appearance at Cordelia's breakfast table, and I hasten to put myself at—My Uncle's Garret Window.

Tuesday, May 5th, 4 o'clock.

Your new appointment of secretary, my dear uncle, is likely to be a sinecure for to-day. Cordelia and her boy are just gone into the country, and mean to pass some days there; for I saw her maid pack up two clean muslin dresses and four shifts in the chaise seat. Sempronius and his eldest son dine out: I saw the former show Edward the card of invitation, and by his pointing out a particular part of it, I conclude that he was bidding him observe the dinner-hour, and take care to be ready in time; for punctuality is not among the number of Edward's good qualities. However, he will not be late to-day, for he is dressing at this moment. A hackney-coach stops at the door. Sempronius and Edward are both gone, so you may lay down your pen, my dear uncle!

Wednesday, 5 o'clock.

To-day promises to be as barren as yesterday. Sempronius has finished a solitary meal in his own study, and is now making a tooth-pick. It seems he is not very skilful, for he has already spoiled two quills, and now in a pet he throws the splinters of the third to one side of the room, and the penknife to the other. Deuce take the peevish old fellow! I protest his ill-temper almost makes me lose mine. I'll step upstairs and see what Edward is about.

I might as well have stayed where I was; Edward is not at home. Look! look! the study door opens; now then we shall have something interesting, p'shaw! it's only the maiden aunt, but this is not her usual time for visiting us and bless my heart! what a fuss the old woman seems to be in! She opens the door which communicates with Cordelia's drawing-room, and looks round to see whether the coast is clear. I protest I can as little tell what to make of her mysterious proceedings as her brother, who sits there with his mouth open, his eyes staring, his brows drawn together, his hands resting on his knees, and his whole body bending forwards. He is mightily puzzled!

But now we shall get a little insight into the business. The virgin has seated herself close at his elbow, and with her nose almost running into his ear (I am sure I pity him, poor man! I should so much dislike myself to have the old cat thus near me!) she opens all the sluices of her eloquence, while her arms assist her speech with all the powers of gesticulation.

Now what can she be chattering about? Something of consequence, that is certain, and of no pleasant import, that is equally sure; for Sempronius grows darker with every syllable, there! he was on the point of jumping up in a rage, but his tormentor grasped him by the arm, and forcing him into his chair again, insisted upon being heard to the end; still do the symptoms of repressed passion grow stronger and stronger. Now then, ay! now the lava overflows! the man is absolutely terrific when he is really incensed, till now I had only seen him play the Jupiter Tonans, when little domestic contrarieties had occurred to put him out of his way; but his anger was merely a gentle breeze compared to his present emotions. His mind is now agitated by a tempest, a tornado, a sirocco, burning and pestilential! I never saw a man in such a passion before. Bless my soul! bless my soul! what can the old cat have been telling him?

All of a sudden he leaves off prancing about the room, stalks up to his sister's chair, looks her full in the face; an appeal to her conscience, no doubt; a solemn inquiry whether all that she has been saying is not a falsehood of her own invention; the aunt is highly offended at the question, she rises with great dignity from her seat, she stretches out her yellow arm and is going to call heaven to witness that—no;

no; she points to the door leading to the staircase, and a contemptuous sneer which accompanies the action assures me that she tells Sempronius that there lies the way by which he may remove all doubts. I am right. Sempronius bounces to the door, in his impatience he cannot turn the lock; he kicks the door violently, and at length it gives way; he beckons his sister and disappears. A prayer-book has almost forced itself out of her pocket; she stops to push it back again, and then follows her brother, with her hands placed orderly before her and the composure of a saint! Good soul! Bless my heart! what mischief can she be about! it is growing dusky; I declare I have a great mind to run down into the street, and watch for their coming out; then by dodging them unobserved, who knows but I may discover at last—stop! stop! I may spare myself the trouble, as I hope to live and breathe, the amiable pair are at this very moment in Edward's chamber.

Sempronius stands before his son's writing-desk; it is fastened, but that matters little; the father has forced the lock, open flies every drawer, out flies every paper, surely no deficiency in the counting-house, no suspicious entries in his books, oh! no: I have been too long intimate with Edward, and know his character and heart too well; such a thing is quite impossible; besides Sempronius finds a purse half full and throws it aside with an air of indifference; ha! ha! now I understand him! He examines the secretaire, he suspects that there is a private drawer, yes; what he wishes to discover (ah! I could tell him where to find them!) are precisely those very things which Edward is most anxious to hide from everyone. No eye has ever been suffered to see them but his own and mine; these are what Sempronius wishes to find. Mercy upon me! He has found them, the secret spring has given way; the drawer is open! And what does it contain? First comes a thick packet of letters, carefully tied together with a riband, colour sky-blue. (Have you written it down, my dear uncle? Very well!) Secondly, a nosegay, but so faded, that I cannot even guess at the flowers! Thirdly, upon my honour, nothing less than a miniature in a shagreen case! Sempronius shakes his head, and shows it to his sister; it is plain that he has never seen the original. His sister scarcely look at it, but shrugs up her shoulders: it is equally plain that she has never seen the original either, and that the object of Edward's attachment as yet is only conjectured. Yet Sempronius does not seem the least displeased, for down goes the miniature on the floor, and away flies the poor skeleton of a nosegay out of the window. Alas! alas, for Edward, the ill-natured aunt has certainly discovered what I flattered myself was a secret only known to himself and to me; and she is now determined to take ample revenge on him for having occasionally dared to be of one opinion when she was of another.

While Sempronius is busied with the secretary, the antiquated dragon of virtue is by no means idle, she has been tossing over Edward's wardrobe for the careless youth had left the key in the lock. Her brother is now reading the letters one after another; however, their contents seem by no means to his taste, for he seldom gets through more than half a dozen lines before the paper bestrews the floor with a thousand pieces; yet still he proceeds to inspect the next. Hold! hold! Sempronia interrupts him! she has found a prize! but I cannot see anything in it which should give her so much joy; it seems to me nothing more than a plain white dimity waistcoat, which was hanging upon the arm of a chair, unconscious of harm and meditating no treason. Ha! but the aunt has discovered an inner pocket on the left side, exactly on the place against which the heart must beat. From this Sempronia now draws forth with a look of triumph a riband ornamented with embroidery in silver. Well! I protest, I can still see no harm in the riband—Sempronius, however, is not of the same opinion, for down go the remaining letters on the floor, while he seizes the riband and examines it closely. Ha! now I comprehend! the letters were not signed; there was a doubt respecting the writer; but on the riband, the name of the giver was embroidered; though whether at length, or only the initials, I will not pretend to say; however, either has answered Miss Grimalkin's purpose, for she draws up her scraggy neck half a yard higher; while her brother's face looks like a volcano, all black and fiery, and away fly the riband and the waistcoat through the window into the street.

They fall exactly upon the head of a passenger, who, quite surprised at this unexpected salutation, stops and disengaging his head from the waistcoat, picks up the riband whose glittering ornaments—may I never speak again, if it is not Edward himself!—he recognizes the precious pledge of affection: but thrown into the street! He makes but one spring to the door—ring, ring, ring goes the bell, an old grey-headed footman opens the door, Edward rushes in, the door closes. I see that Sempronius and his amiable sister have heard the bell ring violently but before they had time to conjecture the cause, Edward stands before them breathless with speed and anxiety, his cheeks burning, his eyes starting, his mouth open, and the important riband still fluttering in his hand; his spaniel too has recognised his master's property, and has dragged the white dimity waistcoat upstairs in his mouth. Edward has got no further than the door; there he stands like a statue, as if petrified by the sight of the two arch-foes of his love, while the fragments of the letters strewn on the floor leave him no doubt, that the repository of his dearest secret has been violated.

"Walk in, young gentleman, pray, walk in, we shall be very glad of your company!" cries the father; not that I hear a syllable, but nothing can be more expressive of sarcastic politeness than the frequent bowing of his head, and the waving his hand backwards and forwards, while his lips quiver and his eyes flame. And now he points to the miniature as a proof, which puts the case out of doubt.

And how does Edward look? like some miserable sinner, surprised *in flagrante?* not he, truly; the first thing he does is to seize the misused picture, and press it to his heart, as if anxious to make atonement for its having been treated so unworthily; and now he advances towards his father slowly but firmly, and with humility but not meanness, takes his hand, and raises it affectionately to his lips.

Now if I were Sempronius this submissive action would go a great way towards softening my heart: I should find it very difficult to remain quite as angry as I intended. But whether he is himself conscious of this effect, and is afraid of giving way to his own weakness, or whether he is ashamed of yielding so soon, and before a witness who would not fail to upbraid him for his folly, whatever be the cause, it is certain, that Edward's humility has not produced the desired effect: on the contrary Sempronius seems to be more incensed than before; and repulsing his son with violence, the sudden movement makes him strike his hand against the lips, which were in the act of kissing it. Edward starts back hastily and covers his mouth with his handkerchief; but he endeavours in vain to conceal the blood which gushes from his bruised lips: the cambric is dyed with crimson. This sight rouses even old Grimalkin's sensibility; she looks alarmed and places herself between them, while she grasps her brother by the arm.

And now instead of being Sempronius, if I were Edward, I would stand boldly on the consciousness of my good intentions, and collecting the whole firmness of my character, I would tell the choleric old man, "And yet, in spite of this ill-usage, I still kiss in spirit, with sincere affection, the hand which repulses me so unkindly. Yes, I avow it! and my only fault is that I did not avow it sooner, a virtuous maiden possesses my whole heart. I love her and shall love her while I live! Here is her portrait; but it is painted here"—and then I'd point to my heart—"in colours never to be effaced. Perhaps you will disapprove of my attachment at first; but only become acquainted with her merits, and I am certain of obtaining your consent. Nay, I should be certain of it even at this moment, if, instead of tearing her letters, you could but have had patience to read them through."

Now I'd wager my pocket telescope, which at this moment is invaluable, against the old goosequill with which you are writing, my dear uncle, that as soon as the blood would permit him to speak, Edward said these very words, or at least something very like them. He showed the miniature, he pointed to his heart, and afterwards to the letters, he clasped his hands together, and raised his eyes to heaven with a look of such enthusiasm, while attesting the perfections of his mistress. Upon my word, I did not give the hot-headed youth credit for so much temper and good sense.

Sempronius exercises his only talent: he fumes and storms, and stalks about the room, and curses and swears, and calls heaven and hell to witness: while the good lady sister, having completed her benevolent work, sits by the window and looks into the street, quite unconcerned, and as if she had nothing at all to do with the business.

So much the better; now that her venomous tongue is at rest, the storm begins to slacken. Sempronius walks backwards and forwards in silence for some minutes. Now he stands still, and leans against the wall with his forefinger extended upon his cheek, as if buried in profound thought; he has come to a decision; he advances towards his son, and—Heaven be thanked! then paternal affection still lives in his bosom, for of his own accord he offers his hand to Edward. Edward springs forward eagerly to grasp it. But hold! Sempronius draws it back, and the forefinger of it repeatedly moving upwards and downwards assures me that he is laying down the conditions upon which Edward may be restored again to favour.

Edward starts back; he stands motionless: his eye burns; he seems to struggle against his feelings: if Sempronius were not his father, I should expect to see the youth turn his back upon him with contempt. In short, he looks to me exactly as if the terms of peace just proposed had been "an absolute renunciation of the maiden in question, and for ever!"

I am certainly right, for at length Edward has recovered the power of speech. He places one hand upon his heart; he raises the other to heaven with an air of the most determined resolution; and with every word which he utters his courage and his enthusiasm appear to increase. But he is not suffered to speak long. The tempest again rages; Sempronius interrupts his son with a fresh burst of thunder, and now that the fire is rekindled, the rattlesnake in petticoats takes care to throw in a word or two as she looks over her shoulder towards the disputants, and kindly prevents the flame from being extinguished a second time.

The Lord be praised! this embarrassing scene at length is concluded. Sempronius's passion on a sudden gives place to the most frozen composure: he spreads his arms out widely, and with a shrug of the shoulders and a slight inclination of the head, he pronounces a single decisive sentence, and quits the room. Edward turns pale; he looks as if he could scarcely credit his hearing, and remains like one thunderstruck. Can you possibly guess, my dear uncle, what it was that Sempronius said at parting, and which produced so strong an effect? For my own part, I am completely puzzled.

The aunt, however, does not think proper to make her retreat at present. No, she is preparing to give her nephew a long lecture; for she turns her chair round, clears her throat in her pocket-handkerchief, smooths her petticoats, and takes a pinch of snuff. Now then, she begins.

She might spare her breath, for Edward does not hear a syllable: he seems totally absorbed in his own gloomy reflections. The virgin might have talked on till doomsday uninterrupted by him, if she had not unadvisedly taken into her head to pick up the fragments of one of the letters, which accident had thrown at her feet; and now as proof of the facts advanced in her discourse, she proceeds to read the letter aloud with a sneering look and theatrical action. The well-known words give Edward the alarm; he awakens from his lethargy. This unwarrantable intrusion into the secrets of his heart, this scornful treatment both of his mistress and himself, at once restores his presence of mind. He springs forward, snatches the paper from her hands, and throwing his arms around her, bears her swiftly but without roughness, to the landing-place. She evidently resists; her open mouth assures me that she protests loudly against this involuntary exit: but she is already on the wrong side of the threshold. Edward closes and bolts the door, and my eyes behold no longer this model of feminine perfection.

My grief for this loss, however, is but of short duration; she bounces into her brother's study, and renews her attacks upon him with increased zeal. Sempronius has seated himself at his writing-desk; he has written two notes, and in one of them (which was very short) he now encloses a parcel of bank-bills; he rings the bell and sends the old grey-headed servant out with the other. The aunt continues talking without repose, but she gets no answer. Sempronius walks up and down the room, silent, and gloomy, and without attending to her; he seems impatient for the messenger's return.

The domestic is come back—he receives the other note with its enclosure, and retires a second time; but in a minute after I see Edward undraw the bolt of his door, and the servant enters; probably, the good old man guesses the contents of the note, for while he delivers it, he turns away his head, and the back of his hand passing over his eyes, rapidly appears to be wiping away tears.

The unfortunate lover receives the note with a firm countenance; but his resolution only lasts till he has perused the contents; the letter falls from his trembling hand; his arms drop powerless by his side; he rests his head against the frame of the window: he seems totally absorbed in the bitterness of his sensations.

The old domestic opens a closet-door, and draws forth a moderate sized trunk: undesired, he proceeds to pack up the contents of a wardrobe, and of a chest of drawers. Alas! alas! poor Edward! now then I know the decision of your unyielding father. The punishment pronounced upon you for possessing a feeling heart, eyes for beauty and sympathy for worth, is nothing less than banishment from your paternal mansion.

The trunk is packed and corded, and now with a countenance expressive of the deepest melancholy the old man offers Edward the key. Edward sees him not, hears him not, heeds him not, till he feels his right hand moistened with tears—he starts from his lethargy—he looks down—the venerable servant kneels at his feet; he has clasped the hand of his young master in both of his and presses his lips upon it. Edward compels him to rise and shakes the old man by the hand heartily and kindly—he takes the parcel of notes from the floor, and selecting one, gives it to his old attendant; but the servant looks at it with a melancholy smile, shakes his head, lays it upon the writing-desk, and hiding his eyes with his hands, he quits the apartment.

Edward now proceeds to examine his papers. Some of them are fastened together again with the aforementioned blue riband, and deposited in his bosom—with the rest he fills his pockets indiscriminately; the bank-notes are placed in a small red-morocco case, and confided to his waistcoat—the spaniel frisks around the table, and every now and then I hear him bark joyously: probably he is aware that his master prepares to go out, and for his part, he is quite ready to be of the party. But his gaiety makes a singular contrast with his master's melancholy.

Hark!—a post-chaise comes rattling up the street!—it stops before Sempronius's house—the door is already open: the postilion dismounts; he and the old servant are now in Edward's room, and carry out the trunk between them!—What, then, my poor friend Edward, am I quite to lose you?—Will your severe father not even suffer you to breathe the same air with him?—Now, by my soul, my heart bleeds for you!

The trunk is tied on—the postilion is on his horse—the chaise-step is let down—the old servant appears again in Edward's room—Edward starts up and follows him, evidently making a violent effort to tear himself away; but when he reaches the door, he stops, and turns to take a melancholy farewell-look of that chamber, which perhaps he has inhabited even from his earliest years, where he has passed so many happy and so many bitter hours, where he has so often smiled and so often wept, which he now quits, and probably for ever!—He draws his hat down over his eyes, and as he passes the threshold I can see his knees tremble!—Alas, poor youth! with a broken heart do you quit your father's dwelling; it seems, that even to say farewell to your stern judge is forbidden you!—oh! suffer with patience;

suffer with firmness; preserve your good heart pure from every too bitter reflection upon him, who harsh as he is, is still your parent. He has ceased to act as a father, but never forget that you are a son.

I am too much grieved by Edward's departure to attend with any patience to the amiable pair in the study below; they may do what they please, for I will not honour them at present with my attention. Therefore, my dear uncle, you may lay down your pen for to-day; into the bargain, in half an hour now it will be too dark for me to—

Sit down again! sit down again, my dear uncle! Edward is not yet gone! At this moment he stands before his mother's picture, which (as I told you formerly) hangs over the sofa in Cordelia's sitting-room—his eyes are rooted upon those beloved features—"Ah! mother!" methinks I hear him say, "it is well for you that you sleep in the grave! It is well that you are not here to see your only son banished from the house and heart of his father, and to kiss away these tears which you would surely mingle with your own! Perhaps, were you still alive, all this would not happen; perhaps you would fold your arms round the son, who to-day is thrown out upon the wide world without shelter, and then, when my father heard the prayers of an agonized mother pleading for her only child—oh! were you but alive, my mother—were not your place now filled by a stranger!"

No, no! these last sentences Edward did not say—I wrong his justice; he is not so ungrateful for all Cordelia's kindness; for, see, he fastens the silver-embroidered riband round an alabaster vase, which stands on Cordelia's chimney-piece; doubtless he wishes to convince his stepmother that he thought of her at parting, and has bequeathed her this precious gift of love as a silent memorial of his undiminished friendship—oh! she will certainly find your legacy, poor Edward, and her own feeling heart will interpret to her the intentions and the sentiments of yours; she will often think of you while absent, will labour incessantly to effect your return; and while Cordelia remains there, you will not be quite forgotten within the dwelling of your father.

Again he turns to his mother's picture, near it hangs a small sketch of it in Indian ink, the production of Willy's all-imitating pencil; it is drawn upon a sheet of letter-paper, and fastened against the wall with a pin, thus (with the true vanity of a youthful artist) boldly challenging a comparison with the original. There are a thousand defects in the drawing; but even from hence I can see that he has succeeded in catching the resemblance. Edward eagerly snatches the paper from its place, and then having pressed his lips with pious enthusiasm upon the frame of the picture, he hastens from the apartment as abruptly as if he dreaded lest his father should appear, and deprive him of his newly found treasure.

Edward is in the chaise—the post-boy flourishes his whip—Edward is gone!

Friday morning.

I have nicked the very moment: Cordelia's chaise stands before the door, and the old servant and the maid are busy in taking out the seat, and several parcels. The drawing-room door opens and gay as a lark little Willy comes jumping into the chamber. His mother then cannot be far off. He carries a roll of paper under his arm, as black and smoky as if it were a manuscript dug out of the ruins of Herculaneum; he unrolls it and holds up the contents to admire their reflection in the looking-glass. Now I understand what makes the boy seem so proud and happy: at the house where he has been visiting he discovered two old coloured prints, one representing a battle, and the other a hunting-match, and his good-natured host has gratified the future Raphael by making him a present of them both. Well, Willy, this is a treasure indeed!

But see! his mother makes her appearance—the old domestic follows her. Ah! then she has already heard of Edward's banishment; I could swear it by her pale countenance and dejected air. Without taking off her pelisse, she walks slowly towards the sofa, seats herself upon it, and leaning her arm upon the table and her cheek against her hand, she seems buried in thoughts evidently of no pleasant nature—she now addresses a few short questions to the servant; his answers are equally brief—he is dismissed and Willy is ordered to accompany him.

Cordelia is now alone—she sits with her hands clasped, her eyes fixed upon the carpet. Now she raises them to heaven as if she uttered a mental prayer, and then wipes away a tear. Ah! her husband has long accustomed her to the expression of this silent grief—she rises, and paces up and down the chamber with an absent look; now her eye rests upon the flower vase, round which the embroidered riband is fastened!—she stops—she seems to be endeavouring to recollect where she had seen it before—she unties it, and while she reads the silver characters, a melancholy smile plays on her pale cheek, and she shakes her head dejectedly. Now she unlocks a small japanned cabinet, in which she is accustomed to keep her most valuable ornaments, and in one of the drawers of which she deposits the embroidered riband—now suddenly she closes the cabinet, locks it, and conceals the key in her pocket.

The door opens—Sempronius enters. Oh! then she had heard him coming upstairs. He has a pen stuck behind his ear, and probably is just come out of his counting-house (I suppose that it is in the back part of the house) to welcome his wife on her return home. The visit, however, does not seem to be quite in his taste; he looks like a schoolboy who has committed some fault and expects to be scolded by his tutor. The first compliments are over, and the interview becomes quite comical; he evidently does not well know how to begin the relation of what has occurred during her absence, and she for her part does not seem at all inclined to give him the least assistance. They are both silent; he hums and haws, and scrapes the carpet with his feet; and sits by no means comfortably upon his chair. Bravo! how unusually polite the man is grown! he insists upon helping Cordelia to take off her pelisse, the pelisse is folded up, and yet the conversation does not get on; Sempronius walks to the window, and draws one of the Venetian blinds up. Thank you, good sir! it was very much in my way, but now I can see what you are about much better; he picks up a knitting needle, which had fallen on the floor; he looks out of window, and beats time against the frame with his fingers; now he walks to the fireplace, and sets his watch by a small chamber-clock which stands upon the mantelpiece: the clock is out of order, and has not gone for nine days to my certain knowledge.

But Cordelia, whose gentle heart cannot bear to see any human being suffer, however deservedly, now relieves him from his painful embarrassment. She rises from the sofa, with a look at once expressing the most friendly interest and the most dignified reproach, she clasps the hand of her husband, she leads him back to the sofa, and places him before the portrait of his deceased wife; there is something so noble, so exalted in her look and attitude, that she appears to me like a superior being! how clearly does her countenance express that she says at this moment to her husband, "Could yonder lips now say to you, 'Thou harsh father, where is my son?'—to such a question, what answer could you make?"

He fixes his eyes on the ground; he dares not look upon the face either of the inanimate mother of his child, or of her living representative.

And now the excellent woman implores him not to be cruel to his son and to himself, while she gives unrestricted course to her tears, and while she endeavours to awaken his feelings by caresses, which express the most heartfelt interest and goodwill, and can Sempronius resist her entreaties?

No, no! it would have been impossible, if he were not already so very much in the wrong; he feels that to give way at all, would now be to confess that in the whole affair his harshness had been inexcusable; false shame prevents his retracting the sentence which he ought never to have pronounced. Unless Edward were declared to be an undutiful son, he should be tacitly proved to be himself the most unnatural of fathers. He therefore wilfully hardens his heart and blinds his judgment, in order to escape from the conviction of his error, and he now begins a long and animated narrative of all that has passed. Oh! how I wish that I were at his elbow in order that I might set him right occasionally in point of historical fact, if it were only for the love that I bear his good lady sister, who, if I had the management of the brush, should not be painted in this family picture in colours too flattering.

Sempronius's narrative has not produced the desired effect upon his wife, but at least he has contrived to talk himself once more into a persuasion that everything which he has done has been perfectly proper. It was visible how his importance and self-satisfaction increased with every succeeding period, for the longer he talked, the redder grew his face and the more violent his action; at first his only object was to conceal, under an appearance of resentment, how much Cordelia's representations had effected him; but he has succeeded in working himself up into a real fury, which has now got such complete possession of his mind as even to make him unjust towards Cordelia. Her tears which stream afresh—the sudden glow which flushes her pale cheeks—the look of mild reproach, which she casts upon her accuser, and which declares herself fully justified before the tribunal of her conscience—all these circumstances can have no reference, except to some severe reproof which Sempronius, in the violence of his passion, has just pronounced against his admirable wife. Perhaps he accuses her of countenancing his son in his disobedience, perhaps she has been long the confidante of Edward's love affair, perhaps she is acquainted with the maiden in question, and it was through her means that her stepson first formed an acquaintance which, according to Sempronius's view of the business, threatens to overturn that prosperity and respectability which he has been labouring all his life to establish. Whatever be the fault laid to Cordelia's charge, at least her husband ceases to reproach her with it for the present. The church clock strikes—I suppose that it reminds him that it is time for him to go to the Exchange, for he quits the room abruptly, and bangs the door after him with such violence that he makes all the windows rattle. Business also calls me away myself, therefore farewell, my dear uncle, till after dinner.

Friday afternoon.

Sempronius dines at four; the meal to-day has been unusually short. It is not yet five and Sempronius has already shut himself up alone in his study, a certain sign that he is still out of temper. Ah! Cordelia is never out of temper. With a resigned melancholy air she is seated at her pianoforte. A small upright book is open before her; to judge by its dark-blue cover, and by the small proportion which the music bears to the words printed at the bottom, I suspect that she is singing something out of the Edinburgh edition of *Scotch Melodies;* probably some plaintive air, which accords with the present disposition of her thoughts. At least the slow movement of her fingers, the expression of her countenance, and her head reclining a little (but only a little) towards her left shoulder, convince me that she must be playing an adagio.

A girl enters with a band-box. Surely I have seen her face before. Oh! now I recollect her; she carries out parcels for the milliner, who lives a few doors further down the street. She opens her band-box; but Cordelia shakes her head. It seems that she wants nothing of that kind at present; but, when refused in so gentle a manner, why should the girl look so frightened? She casts a look of apprehension round her. . . . Hey-day! she has suddenly snatched a letter out of her band-box, thrown it into Cordelia's lap, and now she runs downstairs ready to break her neck. The ambassadress must know but little of Cordelia, if she supposes that she will receive a letter, which reaches her by so mysterious a conveyance. Accordingly she has already quitted the pianoforte in pursuit of the fugitive—the letter has fallen on the ground, and . . . but softly! she stops suddenly with her hand resting upon the lock of the door. The letter which now lies on the carpet has caught her eye; she certainly must have recognised some well-known handwriting.

She has!—she springs towards the letter, seizes it eagerly, and conceals it in her bosom, while a deep crimson overspreads her face. She now opens the other door opposite to that by which the milliner left her; probably it leads to her bed-chamber, which is in the back part of the house; the door closes, and I see Cordelia no longer.

What can be the meaning of all this? Surely I know Cordelia too well to . . . Is it possible that I should have formed an erroneous opinion of her character and principles? Nay, if I find myself deceived here in my notions of female virtue, I will never look for it elsewhere.

Ha! I begin to fear that the mystery will be unravelled in the most disagreeable manner. The staircase door is thrown open, and Sempronia makes her appearance, and hands into the room (not very gently or politely, I must confess) the milliner's apprentice! The venerable virgin seems to be in a great heat! what has happened? I suppose she met the girl on the stairs; and if she was hurrying down them as quick as she bolted out of the drawing-room, no wonder if she excited suspicion in the fair bosom of Miss Grimalkin, who, I warrant, has brought her back, in order that she might examine her quite at her ease.

The examination is not a very quiet one. Our dearly beloved aunt is somewhat more violent than becomes a grand inquisitor; and the supposed culprit does not seem to want for spirit. Now they both talk together. If I were not so intimately acquainted with the affairs of this family, I should think that Sempronius had imported two fish-wives from Billingsgate.

The music of these two nightingales has attracted the notice of the master of the house, and he leaves his study to enjoy it more distinctly. He inquires the cause of all this uproar; but the ladies talk on without listening to him. Sempronia examines the band-box; the milliner with sarcastic politeness turns out the contents of her pockets, and begs the virgin to convince herself that there is nothing concealed in her thimble and a silver nutmeg grater. Now the storm rages more violently than ever, till Sempronius bursts out like a clap of thunder, and terrifies them both into silence. He menaces the girl with his finger. He points down the street. Ay, I suppose he threatens her with a complaint to her mistress, for she begins to look uneasy, keeps edging away towards the door, and at last appears to have considerable satisfaction in being permitted to make her escape in a whole skin. Sempronia, however, seems more martially inclined than ever since the retreat of the enemy. She proceeds to harangue with the most violent action, heedless of her brother's impatience, while he walks up and down the room, but in a sudden he stands still, and stares her full in the face, while his countenance expresses the greatest dismay and astonishment. Some important word has escaped her, which evidently has touched the master-string of his whole united sensibilities. She, too, seems considerably embarrassed at the hardy assertion which has just fallen from her. She is silent; but now she makes up her mind. She strikes her right hand closed against the open palm of her left with a look of diabolical determination, and then seizing her brother's arm, draws him back again into his study, and shuts the door.

The secret which she is now disclosing is clearly no trifle. How uneasy, how gloomy seems Sempronius! Now he starts from his chair, opens the door leading to the drawing-room, looks in to ascertain that nobody is there, then enters, and motions to his sister to follow him; the sweet creature does not require to be told twice. They approach Cordelia's writing-desk; it is unlocked—now shame upon him! He is examining the pens to see whether they have been used lately; while his worthy sister inspects the inkstand in hope of discovering some fallen drops upon the brink of it, and feels whether there is any remaining warmth to be perceived in the sealing-wax.

They have made no discoveries, and are now returning to the study. Sempronius, however, comes back to the writing-table, and counts the sheets of paper, in order that, if his wife should carry on any correspondence unknown to him, the deficiency of a sheet may apprize him of the fact. Ah! my worthy friend, how richly do you deserve the fate of which you are so apprehensive.

I am tired of this *tête-à-tête*. Is nothing to be discovered in the other apartments? Stay, did I tell you, my dear uncle, that there is an old lumber-room which joins Edward's forsaken bed-chamber? As nobody ever enters this place, except to store away empty boxes or useless furniture, Willy is here secure from interruption, and has accordingly selected it for his painting-room. Here he passes hour after hour in scratching and daubing; and here he is established at this very moment. The two coloured prints are stretched against the wall, and he often suspends his work to gaze in admiration upon the gorgeous assemblage of reds, and blues, and greens, and yellows; an assemblage, however, which he is unable to rival in his present performance; for he has emptied all his shells of paint, and has no better resource than the inkstand.

The work is complete. He seems to be mightily pleased with it. He opens the window and holds the piece of paper out of it, waving it backwards and forwards, in order that the ink, which he has not spared, may dry in the open air the sooner. If he would but turn himself ever so little more to the right, I should be able to favour him with my opinion of his performance. That will do, my little friend. Upon my word, very clever. I never saw a more striking resemblance! 'Tis the aunt's profile, and as ugly as life. There is no mistaking it; not a wrinkle about the corners of her little fiery eyes is omitted; the twist of her nose is hit off to a nicety, and the falling in of her toothless mouth (though perhaps rather overdone) is excellently preserved; nay, he has not forgotten even the great wart with which her chin is decorated. To be sure it is not a flattering one, but the portrait is the very counterpart of nature in all her undisguised deformity. But what can have induced the young rogue to employ his pencil, or rather his pen, on such an unpromising subject? This is the first caricature that I ever saw him attempt; and if it should fall into the hands of the original, I am afraid that the painter's reward would by no means be of the most satisfactory nature.

He still stands before the window, and seems to be holding forth to himself. He uses a great deal of stiff action, as if he was repeating a speech out of a play. He stops, and appears embarrassed. Now he takes a book from the table, looks into it, sets it upright and open against the window, and proceeds again in his recitation with renewed spirit. I think I can make out a G and an F. Stay, oh, I see—*Gay's Fables*. Every now and then he stops, and looks anxiously up the street; 'tis by that way that his aunt always comes and this is about the time that she usually pays her evening visit.

I have it, I have it; he has some favour to ask of his aunt and hopes to bribe her to grant it by repeating a newly-acquired fable of Gay, and by showing her that he has passed the time of her absence in retracing her beloved resemblance. Oh, poor Willy, I fear that if such is your intention, your portrait will be thought much too like to be pleasing. It seems, by his looking so often into the street, he is not aware that Sempronia has been in the house above this half-hour.

He begins to suspect it, for he puts his drawing into his pocket, gives a parting look to his tawdry prints, takes up the box containing the empty colour-shells, and away he goes. The empty colour-shells? There, then, we have the key of the whole mystery. He is ambitious of making a picture all red and yellow, like his favourite prints; but his colour-shells must first be replenished, and this, then, is the favour, to obtain which he has given himself so much trouble.

Cordelia has just returned to the drawing-room. She is already gone again. She only looked at a card which was stuck over the mantelpiece, took a key from a bunch which was in the drawer of her writing-table and immediately left the room with it.

Willy has entered the drawing-room. He has heard his aunt's voice in the adjoining closet, for he advances towards it. Probably the time is not encouraging, for he hesitates, and opens the door softly, and by degrees, in order to reconnoitre the field of action, before he commences the attack. Sempronius looks as black as a live lobster, and his sister as red as a boiled one. Willy seems not to admire the appearance of either, and draws his little curly head back again; but his aunt is already aware of the young spy's vicinity, and before he can effect a retreat she has taken him into custody. Now, then, placing him between her knees, and compelling him to look her full in the face (how can she be so barbarous?) she insists upon his making an exact confession. Perhaps she suspects that his mother had sent him to overhear what she was saying to Sempronius.

The poor child weeps, and protests his innocence. Now she loses all patience, and drags him by the arm to the window, which she opens. What! is she threatening to throw him out of it, unless he instantly confesses himself guilty? No, no, not so bad as that; she is only going to bring forward a proof of the truth of her charge so convincing that there can be no denying it. She points to the story above; she holds a sheet of paper out of the window, and waves it, just as Willy did the portrait. She saw him then, and probably thought that he was making signs to somebody in the street. Did she take the paper for a letter? Perhaps, too, for one written by his mother. Was there ever such a lynx in petticoats? I am half afraid that her keen eyes will discover me with my telescope at the Garret Window, and then I shall be suspected to be the lover in this romance. Fortunately, this business can be easily explained. Don't be so frightened, my little friend, you need only put your hand in your left pocket, and your deceiver will be confounded.

And that is exactly what he does. With trembling hands he draws forth the last production of his genius. She opens it eagerly; nay, there is certainly no mistaking the subject; and now, Willy, now!—there's a glorious subject for your pencil! Le Brun's *Passions* exhibit nothing to be compared with it. Unluckily she does not allow him time to study her. To tear the paper into a thousand pieces—to apply so hearty a slap on his cheek as left five white marks behind it—seize him by the arm, and turn him out of the room, slapping the door in his face—was the work of but a single minute. The unfortunate little artist retires sobbing, to mourn over the annihilation of all his air-built castles.

The closet-conference, too, is at an end. Our beloved aunt has done all the mischief in her power, sees no prospect of doing more at present, and therefore takes her departure quite satisfied with herself.

I assure you, my dear uncle, I do not like the look of this business at all. Cordelia went out just as the postman was going through the street; she sent the old footman back for something, and seized the moment of his absence to give a letter into the postman's care; there was a hurry in her manner of giving it, and she coloured so suddenly and so deeply, that I am certain there was some mystery in the business. In all probability this letter was an answer to that which she received from the milliner. I begin to grow very uneasy; it is at least certain that Cordelia carries on a correspondence, unknown to her husband, with some person in London, for it was not the general post by which the letter was forwarded.

Sempronius is still alone in his own room; he seems in a brown study; sometimes he walks up and down the chamber rubbing his forehead with his hand thoughtfully; sometimes he beats the devil's tattoo, sitting in his elbow-chair. At this moment he is playing upon the table with his fingers, but evidently without attending to what he is about.

Hark! a knock at his door! What! Sempronia returned so soon? It is very unusual for her to make two visits in one evening. What an air of triumph she wears! She must have done some notable mischief, she looks so happy. She puts me in mind at this moment of her prototype, Milton's Serpent—

—Hope elevates, and joy
Brightens her crest.—

The door opens; she goes in, but her companion remains in the street. Surely I have seen that fellow's face before; as I hope to live, the very postman to whom Cordelia confided her letter? He is trying a piece of money with his teeth! A bribe, no doubt, and if the fellow received it from Sempronia—alas! for poor Cordelia's secret.

The aunt throws open the study door, and with a look of exultation slaps down a letter upon the table before her brother. He seizes it; he recognises the hand-writing. I think I can see his hands tremble while he bursts the letter open.

Ha! something has fallen upon the ground, which Sempronia possesses herself of without loss of time. She holds it up triumphantly to her brother. A key? Can it be that which I saw Cordelia even now take off the ring? The same idea has struck the amiable pair, for they are already in the drawing-room. The bunch of keys is in the hands of Sempronius. The look of anguish with which he lets the bunch fall again, tells me too plainly that it is that very key.

Sempronia urges him to read the letter. To judge by his countenance, matters are now worse than ever. The note could have contained but a few words, for it was read in an instant; and if his sister had not stopped him in time, in another instant he would have torn it into a thousand pieces.

I suppose the postman is impatient, for he has just sent the maid-servant up with a message; she is gone down again with a small wax light in her hand, which usually stands upon the chimney-piece. Sempronia picks up the bunch of keys and replaces them in the drawer. She takes the letter from her brother and examines it, she points to the superscription with an inquiring look; he shakes his head. No, he knows nothing of the person to whom the letter is addressed. Cordelia is in secret correspondence with a person of whom her husband knows nothing? That looks very ill; and yet that person may be a woman. Come, my dear uncle, let us believe the best; when there are two sides of the question, I always prefer the most favourable; and to think an accused person in the right till he is actually proved in the wrong, if not the most prudent plan as the world is constituted, at least is certainly the most amiable.

The maid returns with the wax taper lighted; the letter is sealed again with one of Cordelia's own seals, which lay on the writing-table. Now, then, away stalks Sempronia; she restores the letter to the perfidious postman, who bows and leaves her; and now a corner of the street deprives my eyes of the pleasure of gazing upon this paragon of female chastity.

What do you think of all this, my dear uncle? That cursed key! I am horribly afraid that it was the key of some private entrance, of some back door, or garden gate, and that the note specified the hour and day for using it; it could not have contained more, from the short time occupied by its perusal. If this conjecture be just, Sempronius is as well informed of these particulars as either the writer or receiver of the letter; and by his sending it to its destination, I conclude that he means the assignation to be kept. Is it his intention to surprise Cordelia with her unknown correspondent? It looks very like it.

At any rate I hope that this important interview is not fixed for this evening, as business (which cannot be delayed) compels me to desert my post this very moment, and will prevent my resuming it till to-morrow; therefore, my dear uncle, I must beg you to supply my place. I will leave you my telescope—keep a sharp look-out, and then I shall at least have the satisfaction of learning, from your report to-morrow everything which has taken place in Sempronius's family during my absence.

Saturday.

And so, my dear uncle, you are quite certain that I lost nothing by my absence yesterday evening? Nothing occurred worth noticing? Well, then, let me see whether I can have better success in my discoveries.

Hey-day! the old footman is at the door, adjusting the stirrups of a little grey pony, and Sempronius is in the very act of drawing on his boots; he seems preparing to go a journey. Well, then, this cannot possibly be the important day, for so well informed as Sempronius is of the time of the assignation, he certainly would take care not to be out of the way; and that he does not mean to return to-night I conclude from his carrying saddle-bags.

However, he does not leave Cordelia "fair side all unguarded," * for his she-dragon of a sister is just arrived, and her maid follows her, carrying a bundle of clothes. Cordelia's maid appears, and the she-dragon's abigail is given in charge to her, so that I conjecture the sister-in-law is appointed to keep a strict eye over Cordelia's conduct till her brother returns. Methinks Cordelia does not seem quite pleased with this arrangement, though she strives to hide her dissatisfaction under the veil of civilities.

N.B. The she-dragon's abigail is almost as old, and quite as hideous, as her mistress—to make her more so was out of the power of Nature.

Sempronius is gone. Cordelia is busied with household affairs. Our dearly beloved aunt has fixed her spectacles on her hawk's nose, and is knitting away as if her existence depended upon it. This day will probably be unproductive, but I will just look in upon you in the evening, my dear uncle.

Saturday afternoon.

Cordelia is more ornamented than usual; she has a turban on, with a sultana plume, which becomes her singularly. Willy, too, has got his best clothes on—there is certainly something in the wind; his mother is reading to him out of the large Shakespeare, which I mentioned before, but she finds it difficult to make him attend to her; he jumps up every minute and runs to look out at the window.

A quarter past six. Stay!—have the goodness to hand me that newspaper, my dear uncle. Let me see—"Drury Lane—*The Honeymoon*"

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* Comus.

—"Covent Garden—*Macbeth.*" As sure as fate they are going to see *Macbeth*, and Cordelia is trying to make her boy understand the story before they set out.

Just so. A plain, decent-looking coach, with two ladies and a gentleman in it, has just stopped at Cordelia's door. Cordelia takes her gloves and fan; she seems through civility to press her sister-in-law to join their party. How Miss Grimalkin turns up the white of her eyes! ay, I warrant her, she looks upon a theatre as an invention of the wicked one, and would as soon set her foot in purgatory as in a play-house. Cordelia and Willy leave, and she ejaculates something as the door closes, but whether it be a prayer or a curse I will not pretend to decide—for charity's sake we will believe the former.

The coach is gone and I may as well go too. There is nobody at home but Sempronia, and to the shame of my taste be it spoken, I have not the least inclination for a *tête-à-tête* with her. Good night, my dear uncle.

Saturday, ten o'clock.

No wonder, my dear uncle, that you are surprised at my returning so unexpectedly; but, would you believe it? as I was on my way home, even now, a man passed me, whom, in spite of his being muffled up in his great coat, and having drawn his hat down over his eyes, I recognised for Sempronius.

I instantly turned and followed him. He stopped at his own house, and struck thrice with a pebble the drawing-room window, in which there was a light. Instantly the light disappeared; in a minute after the door was opened without noise; the candle in her hand showed me the figure of Sempronia. Her brother stole into the house without speaking, and the door was closed again, as softly as it had been opened.

Then this is the important moment, after all. Cordelia looked at an invitation card—don't you recollect the circumstance? She was aware that her husband was engaged to pass a day in the country, and appointed the evening of it for her assignation. He, on his side, was aware of her arrangement, and pretended to keep his country engagement, in order that he might surprise her with her lover.

Poor, poor Cordelia! To be sure her imprudence is highly blameable, but still . . . if she could but escape this once undiscovered, who knows but the recollection of her danger might induce her to reform altogether? Stay! stay! cannot I— Hang me if I don't warn her.

Eleven o'clock.

I was too late—the play was over. Cordelia was gone—and I am returned fatigued to death.

See, see! Cordelia sits in her drawing-room. Nay, to warn her now without making a tremendous bustle, would be impossible. She must take her chance. Poor, poor Cordelia!

What is she about? She takes papers out of a red morocco case which were deposited in her jewel box; they seem to be bank-notes. Surely she cannot be meditating an elopement? She seals them up and leaves the room.

Sempronia is not to be seen, nor her brother. The servants are gone to bed. Everything seems to be dark and still in the house. Surely that confounded key was not the key of her bed-chamber? such an imprudence would be quite unpardonable, especially as her bed-chamber is in the back part of the house, where I cannot see what goes forward.

Now would I give all that I am worth in the world (it would not be paying a very high price, heaven knows!) to ascertain what Sempronius is about at this moment! I warrant him he stands in some corner unobserved, just as I am doing, as attentive with his ears as I am with my eyes, listening for that which he is afraid to hear, and every instant in danger of betraying himself by the loud and anxious beating of his heart. Ah! if I am right in this conjecture, in spite of all his faults, I can't help pitying the poor miserable devil!

Ha! how is this? A faint ray of light plays upon the glass of the lumber-room windows. This is very unusual. What can any person want at such a time of night in this desolate apartment, which hardly anyone enters even during the day? Can it be Willy, whose zeal for the fine arts has induced him to leave his bed at midnight to prosecute his studies unknown to the family? No! the shadow thrown upon the side wall is of too great a length to be Willy's. The person who carries the light throws it on different parts of the chamber, as if examining whether it is already occupied by anyone. Can it be Cordelia in this solitary apartment—so late at night—her husband supposed at a distance—expecting someone to whom she sent a private key— Oh! if it is Cordelia, she must be guilty!

Guilty! guilty! I could discover in the shadow the peculiar form of the turban and of the sultana plume, with which it was decorated; they were marked out most distinctly. It is she; it is Cordelia! Never again will I pin my faith upon a woman's virtue!

The door has been left ajar, purposely I suppose lest the lover should make a noise in opening it. I can see a faint light advancing along the landing-place. From the circular form of the radiance, I should imagine that it is produced by a dark lantern. Now it enters the room, and shows me the tall figure of a man wrapped up in a great coat. It seems, too, that Cordelia's maid is in her mistress's secrets, for the stranger is accompanied by a female, whose height, shape, and white petticoats perfectly answers the description of Mrs. Betty.

Cordelia's rushlight is too near the window, and the beams of the dark lantern are both too feeble and too far off to permit my distinguishing the emotions, produced by this mysterious meeting, as the countenances of the lovers, not to mention that the gentleman's round hat shades a great part of his features, and that the lady's back is turned directly towards me; however, the eagerness with which Cordelia hastens to meet the stranger, and the tender attitude which he assumes without delay, leave me no doubt of their mutual satisfaction. He is already on his knees before her, and is pressing her unresisting hand to his lips most passionately; and this is the signal for the storm breaking loose which is destined to overwhelm them. The worst fears of jealousy are confirmed beyond the power of doubting; mortal patience can endure no longer, a closet door suddenly bursts open, and like a clap of thunder Sempronius stands in the midst of the affrighted group.

The whole party seems petrified, not excepting Mrs. Betty. Yes, yes, Mrs. Betty, I make no doubt that your mistress's secret-keeper had many a pretty perquisite, but now you must prepare yourself to look about for another place.

Oh, how Sempronius storms! How he threatens the lover! How he upbraids his wife! How, with his hands clasped together, he devotes himself to the infernal duties, if he does not take ample vengeance on the authors of his dishonour. The stranger seems to be converted into marble by this unexpected appearance, for he has not yet had the power of quitting his kneeling attitude.

Sempronius makes such an uproar that he will soon raise the whole house. The company is already increased by two newcomers, but their stature and shape easily enables me to recognize them for old acquaintances; the one is a large water-spaniel, which I have often seen running about the house, the other short figure, who holds a rushlight and stands there astonished in his shirt, can be no other than Willy. I suppose his father's voice had broken his sleep, and made him tremble lest thieves should have found their way into the lumber-room for the express purpose of carrying off such a treasure as his two darling pictures.

His entrance only seems to increase the displeasure of Sempronius. I think I can hear him cry at this distance, "What business have you out of bed, sir?" and at the same time he applies a hearty blow on the round cheek of poor Willy. The boy staggers under the effect of this uncivil salutation, and, fearful of a second, he hastens out of the room; only in his confusion mistaking the way out, he suddenly pulls open the door of Edward's room, and—why!—what the deuce have we got here! a sixth person has tumbled head foremost into the room, Willy has fallen undermost, the spaniel helps the general confusion by barking and has established himself on the back of the outstretched intruder.

Willy has dragged himself from under his oppressor; he calls off the dog, raises the newcomer, who brings his garments hastily into order, and is rewarded for his kindness by a second sound box on the ear. No, fair lady! for it seems the intruder is a female, even if that action had not revealed you, that shape and air are not to be mistaken; you can be no other than our dearly beloved aunt. I suppose the kind soul was indulging her innocent curiosity to know how the storm would end, which she had been so instrumental in raising. With this view she concealed herself in the adjoining bedroom, and she was in the very act of listening at the keyhole with all her ears, when Willy unexpectedly pulled away the supporting door, and occasioned her to make her entrance into the society in a manner so novel and unceremonious.

This occurrence has the power of suspending even the torrent of Sempronius's resentment for a moment; the seducer has recovered the use of his faculties, and has quitted his kneeling posture. He seems disposed to make use of the present confusion, in order to effect his escape; I saw Mrs. Betty whisper him, and I guess that it was a kind hint to seize the opportunity of withdrawing, for he pulls his hat still more over his eyes and advances towards the door.

But Sempronius is aware of his intention, he springs after the fugitive, grasps him furiously by the arm, and forces him back into the middle of the chamber.

Now shame on the dastardly wretch; the seducer falls at the feet of the man whom he has so grossly injured, and with uplifted hands seems to implore his compassion; and Cordelia—I am amazed at her assurance; she walks boldly up to her husband, as if she could justify what in itself is totally unjustifiable—or is she going honestly to avow her preference for the young offender, and her determination to set her husband's anger and the contempt of the world at defiance? I should rather suppose the latter, for with a confident air, she extends her right hand to the kneeling stranger, and takes the dark lantern out of his! What is that for? Hey-day! Now she pulls the seducer's hat off, throws the light full upon his face, and shows her husband—huzza! huzza! huzza! Edward, by heaven!

Virtuous Cordelia, what injustice have we all done you! How rejoiced am I to find myself mistaken, and Sempronius, I fancy, is by no means dissatisfied in finding a banished son where he expected to find a favoured lover. It is at least certain, that he does not withdraw the hand which Edward has seized, and is in the act of pressing to his lips, and what makes me confident that his features have relaxed something of their severity is, that Mrs. Betty is disposed to profit by the present moment to obtain absolution for her own share in the business, and without more ceremony she plumps down on her knees close by Edward. And now Cordelia, turning the lantern away from Edward's face, and throwing the light full upon her suppliant abigail's, discovers, not the features of Mrs. Betty, but those of a girl, not more than seventeen, and lovely as the virgins of Mahomet's fabled paradise.

This, then, was the object of this midnight conference. While we fancied Edward many hundred miles distant from London, love had forbade his wandering further than the residence of his beloved; and for what purpose he sought it is now made quite evident, for he holds up the left hand of the fair stranger, and points to the ring which ornaments the wedding-finger—this important step once taken, he communicated it to his adopted mother; he entreated permission to make known to her the bride of his selection, perhaps, before he set forward to seek with her his fortune through the world. This request must certainly have been conveyed in the supposed love-letter brought by the milliner's girl; the short space of time occupied in the perusal of her answer, as I said before, proved that it only contained a few words, probably nothing more than the time and place of meeting; and as Sempronius was ignorant of the address on the back, Edward must have taken the precaution of desiring his stepmother to direct to him under a feigned name, fearful lest his father by some accident should discover his being still in the metropolis, and prevent Cordelia from granting the so-much desired meeting. The conversation which succeeded her return from the country, left me no doubt that all the intercourse between his wife and son had been prohibited by the stern Sempronius; Cordelia was obliged to have recourse to mystery, however innocent her purpose, and the neglected lumber-room, as being least liable to observation from the servants, was fixed upon as the most fit place for the interview, at which she proposed not only to embrace her stepson's wife as her adopted daughter, but to smooth the difficulties of their road through life, by giving the new-married couple all the pecuniary assistance which it lay in her power to command. It was for this purpose that she sealed up the bank-notes so carefully; it was for this—but while I am making these reflections, a most animated conference has taken place between the undeceived Sempronius and his amiable sister; he seems to reproach her and her misrepresentations for having practised upon his foibles, and rendered him so unjust to his wife, so harsh to his son, so contemptible in the eyes of them both, and even to himself. But the fair accused one does not listen to his remonstrances without evident signs of displeasure. She enters upon her defence with the more warmth, the less there is reason upon her side—he rejoins—she replies—with every moment their expostulations grow more vehement. But now Cordelia interposes like an angel of peace, gently places one white hand before the lips of her incensed husband, and extends the other in sign of amity to her embarrassed sister-in-law. It is received with an air of overstrained humility, that shows Miss Grimalkin would still be impertinent if she dared; and now she thinks it full as well to take her departure, curtsying all around her repeatedly and down to the very ground, and taking care to display all those signs of ironical civility which convert the compliment into an insult. Now she has reached the door, and turning her back most heroically upon the company with all the majesty of a turkey-cock, she gratifies me with her absence. Good night, thou model of stale virginity! Sleep soundly upon your well-earned laurels, and may your dreams be as sweet as your temper.

With her departure from our horizon all clouds seem to vanish. Her brother appears to be grown quite another man, his brow is so clear, his countenance is so much brightened, and his whole attitude expresses that he feels so much more at his ease. Now he embraces his charming wife, and that repentant kiss entreats her pardon of his unjust suspicions. Now he extends the hand of paternal forgiveness to his son, and now, when Edward leads the partner of his heart towards him, does he not fold her to his bosom with all the tenderness of a father? Oh! how lovely appears this scene of domestic reconciliation, though acted in an old lumber-room, and only viewed by the unsteady glimmerings of a rushlight and a dark lantern.

You may as well lay down your pen, my dear uncle, there is nothing more to be seen, or, if there were, I could not see it, till the tears are wiped away, which have dimmed my telescope. And now, thou happy family, for to-night farewell! Here I lay down the office of your historian; and having now been for above two months Edward's most intimate confidant and warmest friend, to-morrow I'll set myself at work to become his acquaintance.

LEIGH HUNT

(1784–1859)

JAMES HENRY LEIGH HUNT was educated at Christ's Hospital and early manifested his inclination toward the pen. By 1808 he was editor of the *Examiner*. In 1811 we find him imprisoned by the Prince Regent for libel. In 1822 he visited Byron and Shelley in Italy, and in 1847 he was in receipt of a pension from the Crown. Besides poems, he published many works in prose: his *Autobiography* is a standard work.

"The Beau Miser" is reprinted from *Tales* (1891).

THE BEAU MISER

AND WHAT HAPPENED TO HIM AT BRIGHTON

THERE was a man of the name of Kennedy, who was well known to the people of fashion in our childhood, but with whose origin, pretensions, or way of living, nobody was acquainted. That he was rich was certain, for he wore the most precious stones on his fingers, and was known to keep a great deal of money at a banker's. He was evidently very fond of the upper circles, and for some time was admitted into their parties. He was now and then at the opera; oftener at routs and balls; and always went to Court, when he could get there.

We have heard him described. He was a very spare man, not much above thirty, of the middle height, with eyes a little shut and lowering, a small nose, and a very long chin. But he dressed extremely well; had a softness of manners amounting to the timid; and paid exceeding homage to every person and thing of any fashionable repute.

All this, for some time, procured him a good reception; but at last people began to wonder that, though he got invitations from everybody, he gave none himself. It was not even known that he ever made a present, or had a person home with him even to a luncheon or a cup of tea. Twice he gave a great dinner, at which it was owned there was a profusion of everything; but, though it was not at a tavern, it was not at his own place of abode; and the people of the house knew nothing about him.

All this gave rise to a suspicion that he was a miser; and people soon contrived to have pretty strong proofs of it. In vain the least bashful of his acquaintances admired the beauty of his numerous rings; in vain others applied to him for loans of money, some by way of trial, and others from necessity; in vain his movements were watched by the more idle and gossiping; in vain hints were thrown out and questions asked; and his very footsteps pursued. His rings were all keepsakes; he always had no money just then; he referred for his lodgings to a hotel where he occasionally put up, perhaps for that very purpose; and a curious fellow, who endeavoured to follow him home one night, was led such an enormous round through street after street, and even suburb after suburb, that he gave up the point with an oath.

After this his acquaintance grew more and more shy of him. They gradually left off inviting him to their houses, some from mercenary disappointment, some from a more generous disgust, others because the rest did so; and at last, just after a singular adventure which happened to him at Brighton, he totally disappeared.

Everybody took him for a madman on that occasion. He had not been at the place above a day or two, and was seen during that time walking about the beach very thoughtfully, with an air of sorrow, owing, it was conjectured, to his having put himself to the expense of travelling without obtaining his expected repayment, for nobody invited him. But be this as it may, he was seen, one morning, running in the most violent manner across the Steyne, and crying out, "Fire!" His face was as pale as death; he seemed every now and then, in the midst of his haste, to be twitched and writhed up with a sort of convulsion; and his hat having blown off by the wind, no wonder he was thought seized with a frenzy. Yet when he arrived at his lodging, there was no fire, nor even a symptom of it.

The suspicion of his being out of his wits was rendered still stronger by a rumour which took place the same day; for the servants of the family which he used to visit most, and in which he was paying his addresses to a young lady, declared that not many minutes after the uproar about the fire, he came to their master's house, through the byways, with a coalheaver's hat on. And the assertion was confirmed by some tradesmen who had seen him pass, and by some boys who had followed him with shouts and nicknames.

The mystery supplied the world with talk for more than a week, when at length it was explained through the family we have just mentioned. Kennedy, it seems, was really a miser, and had inherited the estates of a third or fourth cousin, whose name he took. He had had little or no acquaintance with his kinsman before he found himself his heir. His father was a petty overseer somewhere or other at a distance from London; and the cousin whose estates he succeeded to, was the son of a general officer in the East India Service. The cousin had had a son whom he sent abroad to follow his grandfather's profession; but, receiving the news of his death a little before his own, he sickened the faster, and, being in a state of great weakness and despondency, left his estates to his next heir, without having much heart to inquire what sort of person he was. The fortunate young overseer quitted his shop immediately, and, coming up to town, had occasion to wait on a young lady, to whom his cousin's son had been attached. It was to give her a lock of her lover's hair, and a gold watch which his father sent her with it in token of his own regard for her. A little note accompanied them, which she showed one day with the tears in her eyes, though she was then happy enough:

> I leave you no money, my dear child. I am dying, and you are wealthy enough, and money is not the thing wanted by either of us. Just before I received the news of my poor boy's death, he sent me this lock of his hair for you, to show you how glossy and healthy . . . Excuse me, my love; the tears blot out what I was going to write; and so they ought. But I know well enough that the kind-hearted, generous girl who was worthy

> of him, will think I pay her a greater compliment in leaving her only what belonged to her Charles, than if I had sent her all the money which he ever possessed. The next heir, I am told, is a good young man, and he is poor, with a number of poor relations. The watch was Charles's when a boy. My father gave it me, and I to him, and he used to say that he would— God in heaven bless you, my poor, sweet girl! prays your old
>
> CHARLES KENNEDY.

The consequence of the new heir's visiting Miss Cameron was his falling in love with her—if such a miser as he turned out to be could be said to fall in love. But though she could not help pitying him at first, as she afterwards said, it was only on account of his strange habits, which she soon detected, and which, she saw, would make him ridiculous and unhappy wherever he went. He soon tired and disgusted her. After a very unequivocal repulse one day, which seemed to make him prodigiously thoughtful and unhappy, he came in the evening with a mixture of cold triumph and uneasiness in his aspect, at which Miss Cameron said she could hardly forbear laughing, even from a feeling of bitterness. She saw that he expected to make an impression on her of some sort; and so he did, for, taking an opportunity of speaking to her alone, he drew out of his waistcoat pocket, with much anxiety, the first present his wealth had ever made her, a fine diamond pin—a very fine one, she confessed it was. It was clear that he thought this irresistible; and nothing could exceed his surprise when she refused him peremptorily once more, and the pin with him. She owned that her sense of the ridiculous so far surmounted her other feelings as to give her a passing inclination to accept the diamond, as she knew very well that he had reckoned on its returning to him by marriage. But her contempt recovered itself; and her disgust and scorn were completed by his mentioning the words "Mrs. Kennedy," which brought so noble and lamented a contrast before her, and visited her so fiercely with a sense of what she had lost that she quitted the room with a sort of breathless and passionate murmur.

This was but the day before the adventure of the fire. She was almost inclined on the latter occasion to think him mad, as others did, especially when he once more appeared before her, shuffling in a ludicrous manner, with something in his hand which he wished to conceal, and which she found afterwards was the hat. He would not have ventured to appear before her again; but the truth was, that her father, who was but an ordinary sort of monied man, and not very delicate, did not interfere as he ought, to prevent her being thus persecuted. But not only was the mystery explained to her next day; it was the most important one of both their lives.

On the morning when Kennedy was frightened by the fire, he was standing very thoughtfully by the Ship Inn, near the seaside, when he was suddenly clapped by somebody on the shoulder. He turned round with a start, and saw a face which he knew well enough. It was that of a gentleman who, riding once, when a youth, by the place where he lived, had saved him from drowning in a little piece of water. Some mischievous companions had hustled him into it, not knowing how far their malicious joke might have gone. When he was pulled out, and had recovered from his first fright, he thanked the young gentleman in as warm a way as he could express; and taking fourpence-halfpenny out of a little leathern bag, offered it him as a proof of his gratitude; the young gentleman declining it with a good-natured smile, thinking the offer to be the effect of mere simplicity; but the lads who were looking on, and who had helped to get him out when told of the danger, burst out into taunting reproaches of the fellow's meanness, and informed his preserver that he had at least three shillings in the other fob of his leathern bag, besides silver pennies. So saying, they wrenched it out of his hands, in spite of his crying and roaring; and one of them, opening it, shook out, together with the water, five shillings in sixpences, and the silver pennies to boot. The young gentleman laughed and blushed at the same instant, and, not knowing well what to do, for he longed to give the young miser a lesson, and yet thought it would be unjust to share the money between the lads, who had nearly drowned him, said to him, "I am not the only one to whom you are indebted for being saved, for it was the screams of those little girls there which brought me to you, and so, you know," continued he, with a laugh, which the others joined, "they ought to be rewarded as well as myself. Don't you think so?" "Yes, sir," murmured the young hunks, half frightened, and half sulky. The young gentleman then divided all the silver but a shilling among the little girls, who dropped him a hundred curtsys; and, giving the fourpence-halfpenny to the boy who had been most forward in helping, and least noisy in accusing, rode off amidst the shouts of the rest.

It was the first time the two had met since. "I believe," said the stranger with a sort of smile, "I have had the honour of meeting you before?"

"The same, sir," answered the other, "at your service. I believe, sir—I think—I am sure—"

"Yes, sir," returned the stranger, "it was I who played you that trick with your bag of sixpences."

"Oh, dear sir," rejoined the other, half ashamed at the recollection, and admiring the fashionable air of his preserver, "I am sure I had no reason to complain. Been abroad, sir, I presume, by a certain brownness of complexion, not at all unbecoming?"

"Yes, sir," said the gentleman, smiling more and more; "I hope you have been as lucky at home as some of us who go abroad?"

"Why, yes, sir; I have a pretty fortune, thank heaven, though at present—just now—"

"Oh, my dear sir," interrupted the stranger, with a peculiar sort of look, in which animal spirits and a sense of the ridiculous seemed predominant, "I can wait—I can wait."

"Can wait, sir?"

"Yes, sir; I know what you mean: you have a sort of liberal yearning, which incites you to make me an acknowledgement for the little piece of service I was enabled to render you. But I am not poor, sir; and, indeed, should decline such a thing from any but a man of fortune, and upon any other score than that of relieving his own feelings; so that I can very easily wait, you know, for an opportunity more convenient to you, when I shall certainly not hesitate to accept a trifle or so—a brilliant—or a diamond seal—or any little thing of that sort."

"Bless me, sir, you are very good. But you see, sir, you—you—see—I am very sorry, sir, but no doubt—in the fashionable circles—but at present I have an engagement."

"Ah, sir," said the stranger, with a careless air, and giving him a thump on the shoulder which made him jump, "pray do not let me interrupt you. I only hope you are not lodging in—in—what's the name of the street?"

"North Street?—I tried the Steyne, but—"

"Ah! North Street."

"Why so, sir, pray?" asked the other, with an air of increasing fidget and alarm, and looking about him.

"Why, sir, an accident has just happened there."

"An accident! Oh, my dear sir, you know those sort of things cannot be helped."

"No, sir; but it's a very awkward sort of accident, and the lodger, I understand, is from home."

"How, sir—what lodger—what accident? What is it you mean, dear sir?"

"Why, look there, my good friend, look there!—there they are removing them—removing the goods; a fire has broken out."

Kennedy seemed petrified. There was a great crowd in the street to which the stranger pointed, occasioned by a scuffle with a puppet-show man. The boys were shouting, and the little movable Punch-theatre tumbled about in the top of the fray, looking in the distance like a piece of bedstead, or some other sort of goods.

"There they are," continued the stranger; "now they take away the bedstead—now they bring the engines—now they are conveying out something else. The smoke—don't you see the smoke?"

"O Lord! I do, I do!" exclaimed the miser, who saw nothing but his own imagination, and his boxes of brilliants carried off. He turned deadly pale, then red, then pale again, and, seeming to summon up a convulsive strength, sprang off with all his might, and rushed across the Steyne like a madman.

When he arrived at his lodgings he found the street empty, and the house quite cool, and, being anxious to make the best and quickest of his story with his mistress and her father, went there as instantly as possible; but first, in a great hurry, he borrowed a hat of his landlord, who, half in haste also, and half in joke, gave him one of his coal-meter's, which he unconsciously put on.

Scarcely had he astonished the young lady, and set his foot again out of doors, than he encountered the stranger who played him the joke. His first impulse was to be very angry, but he wanted courage to complain, and, recollecting his first adventure with his preserver, would have passed by under pretence of not seeing him. He was stopped, however, by the elbow.

"My dear sir," exclaimed the stranger, with his old smile, "I rejoice to find that all was safe. Pray," continued he, changing his aspect, and looking grave and earnest, "you know the various families at Brighton; I have found just now that there is one here that will save me a journey to London—the name is Cameron—can you tell me where they live? There is a person of the name of Kennedy also, who, I understand, is here too; but that doesn't signify at present; pray tell me if you know where the Camerons are?"

"There, there, sir," answered the other, almost frightened out of his wits, and anxious to get away;—"there, two or three doors off."

The stranger dropped his arm in an instant, and in an instant knocked at the door. With almost as much speed poor Kennedy returned to his lodging. We know not what he was thinking about, but he surprised the landlord with his exceeding hurry to be gone; and gone he would have been much sooner than he was, if it had not been for a dispute about a bill, which he was in the midst of contesting when a footman came from the Camerons requesting his presence immediately upon important business.

The poor miser's mortifications were not to cease by the way. The footman upon being admitted to him, turned out to be the same person who was riding as a footboy behind the young gentleman when the latter came up to help him out of the water.

"Good God, sir!" says the man, who had something of his master's look about him; "I beg your pardon, but are you the Mr. Kennedy who has got my master's fortune?"

The other had been agitated already; but the whole truth seemed to come upon him as fast as if it would squeeze the breath out of his body, and, muttering a few indistinct words, he motioned to the footman that he would go with him. He then looked about in a bewildered manner for his hat, and, taking up the coalheaver's, which, in spite of some other feelings, made the footman turn aside to hold his own to his mouth, he dropped it down again, and, turning as pale as a sheet, fell back into a chair.

The footman, after administering a glass of water, called up the landlord, and begging him, in a respectful manner, to take care of the gentleman, to whom he would fetch his master, hastened back to inform the latter, who, comparing the accounts of his old acquaintance with the Camerons, had already guessed the secret, to the great wondering of all parties.

You have, doubtless, been guessing with him; and it is easy to fancy the remainder. There had been a false return of the young soldier's death in accounts from the army in India. He had been taken prisoner, and when he obtained his liberty, learnt, with great grief and surprise, that his father had died under the impression that he was dead also, and had left his property to unknown heirs. The property would have been a very secondary thing, in his mind, for its own sake, and he was aware he could regain it, but his father's death afflicted him much, particularly under all the circumstances; and he felt so much anguish at the thought of what Miss Cameron must suffer, to whom he had plighted his faith but two years before, that it was with difficulty he held up against grief, and hurry, and a burning climate, so as not to fall into an illness; the very fear of which, and the delay that it would cause, was almost enough to produce it—not to mention that it was possible his mistress, believing him dead, might too quickly enter into engagements with another, though he did not suppose it very likely. But we need not dwell upon these matters. He found his mistress the same as ever; shed sweet-bitter tears with her for his father, his own supposed loss, and her grieving constancy; and, regaining his fortune, settled an income upon the poor miser; which the latter, remembering the adventure of the drowning, could hardly believe possible.

THOMAS LOVE PEACOCK

(1785–1866)

THOMAS LOVE PEACOCK, son of a London merchant, became an official of the East India Company. But commercial life was as uncongenial to him as the rôle of secretary to Sir Home Riggs Popham, and as he was blessed with certain private means, he was enabled to devote his time to study. He published a number of satirical novels, interspersed with lyrics, amongst the most notable of which are *Headlong Hall* (1816), *Melincourt* (1817), *Nightmare Abbey* (1818), *The Misfortunes of Elphin* (1829), and *Crotchet*

Castle (1831). In addition to his *Paper Money Lyrics* (1837), he produced many other poems and short stories.

"The Capture of Mr. Chainmail" is reprinted from *Crotchet Castle.*

THE CAPTURE OF MR. CHAINMAIL

I

THE MOUNTAIN INN

Ὡς ἡδὺ τῷ μισοῦντι τοὺς φαύλους τρόπους
Ἐρημία.

How sweet to minds that love not sordid ways
Is solitude!

—Menander.

THE captain wandered despondingly up and down hill for several days, passing many hours of each in sitting on rocks; making, almost mechanically, sketches of waterfalls, and mountain pools; taking care, nevertheless, to be always before nightfall in a comfortable inn, where, being a temperate man, he whiled away the evening with making a bottle of sherry into negus. His rambles brought him at length into the interior of Merionethshire, the land of all that is beautiful in nature, and all that is lovely in woman.

Here, in a secluded village, he found a little inn, of small pretension and much comfort. He felt so satisfied with his quarters, and discovered every day so much variety in the scenes of the surrounding mountains, that his inclination to proceed farther, diminished progressively.

It is one thing to follow the high road through a country, with every principally remarkable object carefully noted down in a book, taking, as therein directed, a guide, at particular points, to the more recondite sights: it is another to sit down on one chosen spot, especially when the choice is unpremeditated, and from thence, by a series of explorations, to come day by day on unanticipated scenes. The latter process has many advantages over the former; it is free from the disappointment which attends excited expectation, when imagination has outstripped reality, and from the accidents that mar the scheme of the tourist's single day, when the valleys may be drenched with rain, or the mountains shrouded with mist.

The captain was one morning preparing to sally forth on his usual exploration, when he heard a voice without, inquiring for a guide to the ruined castle. The voice seemed familiar to him, and going forth into the gateway, he recognised Mr. Chainmail. After greetings and inquiries for the absent; "You vanished very abruptly, captain," said Mr. Chainmail, "from our party on the canal."

Capt. Fitzchrome. To tell you the truth, I had a particular reason for trying the effect of absence from a part of that party.

Mr. Chainmail. I surmised as much: at the same time, the unusual melancholy of an in general most vivacious young lady made me wonder at your having acted so precipitately. The lady's heart is yours, if there be truth in signs.

Capt. Fitzchrome. Hearts are not now what they were in the days of the old song: "Will love be controlled by advice?"

Mr. Chainmail. Very true; hearts, heads, and arms have all degenerated, most sadly. We can no more feel the high impassioned love of the ages, which some people have the impudence to call dark, than we can wield King Richard's battle-axe, bend Robin Hood's bow, or flourish the oaken graff of the Pindar of Wakefield. Still we have our tastes and feelings, though they deserve not the name of passions; and some of us may pluck up spirit to try to carry a point, when we reflect that we have to contend with men no better than ourselves.

Capt. Fitzchrome. We do not now break lances for ladies.

Mr. Chainmail. No, nor even bulrushes. We jingle purses for them, flourish paper-money banners, and tilt with scrolls of parchment.

Capt. Fitzchrome. In which sort of tilting I have been thrown from the saddle. I presume it was not love that led you from the flotilla.

Mr. Chainmail. By no means. I was tempted by the sight of an old tower, not to leave this land of ruined castles, without having collected a few hints for the adornment of my baronial hall.

Capt. Fitzchrome. I understand you live *en famille* with your domestics. You will have more difficulty in finding a lady who would adopt your fashion of living, than one who would prefer you to a richer man.

Mr. Chainmail. Very true. I have tried the experiment on several as guests; but once was enough for them: so, I suppose, I shall die a bachelor.

Capt. Fitzchrome. I see, like some others of my friends, you will give up anything except your hobby.

Mr. Chainmail. I will give up anything but my baronial hall.

Capt. Fitzchrome. You will never find a wife for your purpose, unless in the daughter of some old-fashioned farmer.

Mr. Chainmail. No, I thank you. I must have a lady of gentle blood; I shall not marry below my own condition: I am too much of a herald; I have too much of the twelfth century in me for that.

Capt. Fitzchrome. Why then, your chance is not much better than mine. A well-born beauty would scarcely be better pleased with your baronial hall, than with my more humble offer of love in a cottage. She must have a town house, and an opera-box, and roll about the streets in a carriage; especially if her father has a rotten borough, for the sake of which he sells his daughter, that he may continue to sell his country. But you were inquiring for a guide to the ruined castle in this vicinity; I know the way, and will conduct you.

The proposal pleased Mr. Chainmail, and they set forth on their expedition.

II

THE LAKE—THE RUIN

> Or vieni, Amore, e quà meco t'assetta.
> —Orlando Innamorato.

Mr. Chainmail. Would it not be a fine thing, captain, you being picturesque, and I poetical; you being for the lights and shadows of the present, and I for those of the past; if we were to go together over the ground which was travelled in the twelfth century by Giraldus de Barri, when he accompanied Archbishop Baldwin to preach the crusade?

Capt. Fitzchrome. Nothing, in my present frame of mind, could be more agreeable to me.

Mr. Chainmail. We would provide ourselves with his *Itinerarium;* compare what has been, with what is; contemplate in their decay the castles and abbeys, which he saw in their strength and splendour; and, while you were sketching their remains, I would dispassionately inquire what has been gained by the change.

Capt. Fitzchrome. Be it so.

But the scheme was no sooner arranged, than the captain was summoned to London by a letter on business, which he did not expect to detain him long. Mr. Chainmail, who, like the captain, was fascinated with the inn and the scenery, determined to await his companion's return; and, having furnished him with a list of books, which he was to bring with him from London, took leave of him, and began to pass his days like the heroes of Ariosto, who—

> . . . tutto il giorno, al bel oprar intenti,
> Saliron balze, e traversar torrenti.

One day Mr. Chainmail traced upwards the course of a mountain stream, to a spot where a small waterfall threw itself over a slab of perpendicular rock, which seemed to bar his farther progress. On a nearer view, he discovered a flight of steps, roughly hewn in the rock, on one side of the fall. Ascending these steps, he entered a narrow winding pass, between high and naked rocks, that afforded only space for a rough footpath, carved on one side, at some height above the torrent.

The pass opened on a lake, from which the stream issued, and which lay like a dark mirror, set in a gigantic frame of mountain precipices. Fragments of rock lay scattered on the edge of the lake, some half-buried in the water: Mr. Chainmail scrambled some way over these fragments, till the base of a rock sinking abruptly in the water, effectually barred his progress. He sat down on a large smooth stone; the faint murmur of the stream he had quitted, the occasional flapping of the wings of the heron, and at long intervals, the solitary springing of a trout, were the only sounds that came to his ear. The sun shone brightly half-way down the opposite rocks, presenting, on their irregular faces, strong masses of light and shade. Suddenly he heard the dash of a paddle, and, turning his eyes, saw a solitary and beautiful girl gliding over the lake in a coracle: she was proceeding from the vicinity of the point he had quitted, towards the upper end of the lake. Her apparel was rustic, but there was in its style something more *recherchée*, in its arrangement something more of elegance and precision, than was common to the mountain peasant girl. It had more of the *contadina* of the opera, than of the genuine mountaineer; so at least thought Mr. Chainmail; but she passed so rapidly, and took him so much by surprise, that he had little opportunity for accurate observation. He saw her land, at the farther extremity, and disappear among the rocks: he rose from his seat, returned to the mouth of the pass, stepped from stone to stone across the stream, and attempted to pass round by the other side of the lake; but there again the abruptly sinking precipice closed his way.

Day after day he haunted the spot, but never saw again either the damsel or the coracle. At length, marvelling at himself for being so solicitous about the apparition of a peasant girl in a coracle, who could not, by any possibility, be anything to him, he resumed his explorations in another direction.

One day he wandered to the ruined castle, on the seashore, which was not very distant from his inn; and sitting on the rock, near the base of the ruin, was calling up the forms of past ages on the wall of an ivied tower, when on its summit appeared a female figure, whom he recognised in an instant for his nymph of the coracle. The folds of the blue gown pressed by the sea-breeze against one of the most symmetrical of figures, the black feather of the black hat, and the ringleted hair beneath it fluttering in the wind; the apparent peril of her position, on the edge of the mouldering wall, from whose immediate base the rock went down perpendicularly to the sea, presented a singularly interesting combination to the eye of the young antiquary.

Mr. Chainmail had to pass half round the castle, on the land side, before he could reach the entrance: he coasted the dry and bramble-grown moat, crossed the unguarded bridge, passed the unportcullised arch of the gateway, entered the castle court, ascertained the tower, ascended the broken stairs, and stood on the ivied wall. But the nymph of the place was gone. He searched the ruins within and without, but he found not what he sought: he haunted the castle day after day, as he had done the lake, but the damsel appeared no more.

III

THE DINGLE

The stars of midnight shall be dear
To her, and she shall lean her ear
In many a secret place,
Where rivulets dance their wayward round,
And beauty, born of murmuring sound,
Shall pass into her face.
—Wordsworth.

Miss Susannah Touchandgo had read the four great poets of Italy, and many of the best writers of France. About the time of her father's downfall, accident threw into her way *Les Rêveries du Promeneur Solitaire;* and from the impression which these made on her, she carried with her into retirement all the works of Rousseau. In the midst of that startling light, which the conduct of old friends on a sudden reverse of fortune throws on a young and inexperienced mind, the doctrines of the philosopher of Geneva struck with double force upon her sympathies: she imbibed the sweet poison, as somebody calls it, of his writings, even to a love of truth; which, every wise man knows, ought to be left to those who can get anything by it. The society of children, the beauties of nature, the solitude of the mountains, became her consolation, and, by degrees, her delight. The gay society from which she had been excluded, remained on her memory only as a disagreeable dream. She imbibed her new monitor's ideas of simplicity of dress, assimilating her own with that of the peasant-girls in the neighbourhood: the black hat, the blue gown, the black stockings, the shoes, tied on the instep.

Pride was, perhaps, at the bottom of the change: she was willing to impose in some measure on herself, by marking a contemptuous indifference to the characteristics of the class of society from which she had fallen.

And with the food of pride sustained her soul
In solitude.

It is true that she somewhat modified the forms of her rustic dress: to the black hat she added a black feather, to the blue gown she added a tippet, and a waistband fastened in front with a silver buckle; she wore her black stockings very smooth and tight on her ankles, and tied her shoes in tasteful bows, with the nicest possible ribbon. In this apparel, to which, in winter, she added a scarlet cloak, she made dreadful havoc among the rustic mountaineers, many of whom proposed to "keep company" with her in the Cambrian fashion, an honour which, to their great surprise, she always declined. Among these, Harry Ap-Heather, whose father rented an extensive sheepwalk, and had a thousand she-lambs wandering in the mountains, was the most strenuous in his suit, and the most pathetic in his lamentations for her cruelty.

Miss Susannah often wandered among the mountains alone, even to some distance from the farmhouse. Sometimes she descended into the bottom of the dingles, to the black rocky beds of the torrents, and dreamed away hours at the feet of the cataracts. One spot in particular, from which she had at first shrunk with terror, became by degrees her favourite haunt. A path turning and returning at acute angles, led down a steep wood-covered slope to the edge of a chasm, where a pool, or resting-place of a torrent, lay far below. A cataract fell in a single sheet into the pool; the pool boiled and bubbled at the base of the fall, but through the greater part of its extent, lay calm, deep, and black, as if the cataract had plunged through it to an unimaginable depth, without disturbing its eternal repose. At the opposite extremity of the pool, the rocks almost met at their summits, the trees of the opposite banks intermingled their leaves, and another cataract plunged from the pool into a chasm, on which the sunbeams never gleamed. High above, on both sides, the steep woody slopes of the dingle soared into the sky; and from a fissure in the rock, on which the little path terminated, a single gnarled and twisted oak stretched itself over the pool, forming a fork with its boughs at a short distance from the rock. Miss Susannah often sat on the rock, with her feet resting on this tree: in time, she made her seat on the tree itself, with her feet hanging over the abyss; and at length, she accustomed herself to lie along upon its trunk, with her side on the mossy bole of the fork, and an arm round one of the branches. From this position a portion of the sky and the woods was reflected in the pool, which, from its bank, was but a mass of darkness. The first time she reclined in this manner, her heart beat audibly; in time, she lay down as calmly as on the mountain heather; the perception of the sublime was probably heightened by an intermingled sense of danger; and perhaps that indifference to life, which early disappointment forces upon sensitive minds, was necessary to the first experiment. There was, in the novelty and strangeness of the position, an excitement which never wholly passed away, but which became gradually subordinate to the influence, at once tranquillising and elevating, of the mingled eternity of motion, sound, and solitude.

One sultry noon, she descended into this retreat with a mind more than usually disturbed by reflections on the past. She lay in her favourite position, sometimes gazing on the cataract; looking sometimes up the steep sylvan acclivities, into the narrow space of the cloudless ether; sometimes down into the abyss of the pool, and the deep bright-blue reflections that opened another immensity below her. The distressing recollections of the morning, the world and all its littlenesses, faded from her thoughts like a dream; but her wounded and wearied spirit drank in too deeply the tranquillising power of the place, and she dropped asleep upon the tree like a shipboy on the mast.

At this moment Mr. Chainmail emerged into daylight, on a projection of the opposite rock, having struck down through the woods in search of unsophisticated scenery. The scene he discovered filled him with delight: he seated himself on the rock, and fell into one of his romantic reveries; when suddenly the semblance of a black hat and feather caught his eye among the foliage of the projecting oak. He started up, shifted his position, and got a glimpse of a blue gown. It was his lady of the lake, his enchantress of the ruined castle, divided from him by a barrier, which, at a few yards below, he could almost overleap, yet unapproachable but by a circuit perhaps of many hours. He watched with intense anxiety. To listen if she breathed was out of the question: the noses of a dean and chapter would have been soundless in the roar of the torrent. From her extreme stillness, she appeared to sleep; yet what creature, not desperate, would go wilfully to sleep in such a place? Was she asleep then? Nay, was she alive? She was as motionless as death. Had she been murdered, thrown from above, and caught in a tree? She lay too regularly, and too composedly for such a supposition. She was asleep then, and, in all probability, her waking would be fatal. He shifted his position. Below the pool two beetlebrowed rocks nearly overarched the chasm, leaving just such a space at the summit as was within the possibility of a leap; the torrent roared below in a fearful gulf. He paused some time on the brink, measuring the practicability and the danger, and casting every now and then an anxious glance to his sleeping beauty. In one of these glances he saw a slight movement of the blue gown, and, in a moment after, the black hat and feather dropped into the pool. Reflection was lost for a moment, and, by a sudden impulse, he bounded over the chasm.

He stood above the projecting oak; the unknown beauty lay like the nymph of the scene; her long black hair, which the fall of her hat had disengaged from its fastenings, drooping through the boughs: he saw that the first thing to be done, was to prevent her throwing her feet off the trunk, in the first movements of waking. He sat down on the rock, and placed his feet on the stem, securing her ankles between his own: one of her arms was round a branch of the fork, the other lay loosely on her side. The hand of this arm he endeavoured to reach, by leaning forward from his seat; he approximated, but could not touch it: after several tantalising efforts, he gave up the point in despair. He did not attempt to wake her, because he feared it might have bad consequences, and he resigned himself to expect the moment of her natural waking, determined not to stir from his post, if she should sleep till midnight.

In this period of forced inaction, he could contemplate at leisure the features and form of his charmer. She was not one of the slender beauties of romance; she was as plump as a partridge; her cheeks were two roses, not absolutely damask, yet verging thereupon; her lips twin-cherries, of equal size; her nose regular, and almost Grecian; her forehead high, and delicately fair; her eyebrows symmetrically arched; her eyelashes long, black, and silky, fitly corresponding with the beautiful tresses that hung among the leaves of the oak, like clusters of wandering grapes.* Her eyes were yet to be seen; but how could he doubt that their opening would be the rising of the sun, when all that surrounded their fringy portals was radiant as "the forehead of the morning sky"?

IV

THE FARM

Da ydyw'r gwaith, rhaid d'we'yd y gwir,
   Ar fryniau Sîr Meirionydd;
Golwg oer o'r gwaela gawn
   Mae hi etto yn llawn llawenydd.

Though Meirion's rocks, and hills of heath,
   Repel the distant sight,
Yet where, than those bleak hills beneath,
   Is found more true delight?

At length the young lady awoke. She was startled at the sudden sight of the stranger, and somewhat terrified at the first perception of her position. But she soon recovered her self-possession, and, extending her hand to the offered hand of Mr. Chainmail, she raised herself up on the tree, and stepped on the rocky bank. Mr. Chainmail solicited permission to attend her to her home, which the young lady graciously conceded. They emerged from the woody dingle, traversed an open heath, wound along a mountain road by the shore of a lake, descended to the deep bed of another stream, crossed it by a series of stepping-stones, ascended to some height on the opposite side, and followed upwards the line of the stream, till the banks opened into a spacious amphitheatre, where stood, in its fields and meadows, the farmhouse of Ap-Llymry.

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* *’Αλήμονα βότρυν ἐθείρας.*
—Nonnus.

During this walk, they had kept up a pretty animated conversation. The lady had lost her hat, and, as she turned towards Mr. Chainmail, in speaking to him, there was no envious projection of brim to intercept the beams of those radiant eyes he had been so anxious to see unclosed. There was in them a mixture of softness and brilliancy, the perfection of the beauty of female eyes, such as some men have passed through life without seeing, and such as no man ever saw, in any pair of eyes, but once; such as can never be seen and forgotten. Young Crotchet had seen it; he had not forgotten it; but he had trampled on its memory, as the renegade tramples on the emblems of a faith, which his interest only, and not his heart or his reason, has rejected.

Her hair streamed over her shoulders; the loss of the black feather had left nothing but the rustic costume, the blue gown, the black stockings, and the ribbon-tied shoes. Her voice had that full soft volume of melody which gives to common speech the fascination of music. Mr. Chainmail could not reconcile the dress of the damsel, with her conversation and manners. He threw out a remote question or two, with the hope of solving the riddle, but, receiving no reply, he became satisfied that she was not disposed to be communicative respecting herself, and, fearing to offend her, fell upon other topics. They talked of the scenes of the mountains, of the dingle, the ruined castle, the solitary lake. She told him, that lake lay under the mountains behind her home, and the coracle and the pass at the extremity, saved a long circuit to the nearest village, whither she sometimes went to inquire for letters.

Mr. Chainmail felt curious to know from whom these letters might be; and he again threw out two or three fishing questions, to which, as before, he obtained no answer.

The only living biped they met in their walk was the unfortunate Harry Ap-Heather, with whom they fell in by the stepping-stones, who, seeing the girl of his heart hanging on another man's arm, and, concluding at once that they were "keeping company," fixed on her a mingled look of surprise, reproach, and tribulation; and, unable to control his feelings under the sudden shock, burst into a flood of tears, and blubbered till the rocks re-echoed.

They left him mingling his tears with the stream, and his lamentations with its murmurs. Mr. Chainmail inquired who that strange creature might be, and what was the matter with him. The young lady answered, that he was a very worthy young man, to whom she had been the innocent cause of much unhappiness.

"I pity him sincerely," said Mr. Chainmail; and, nevertheless, he could scarcely restrain his laughter at the exceedingly original figure which the unfortunate rustic lover had presented by the stepping-stones.

The children ran out to meet their dear Miss Susan, jumped all round her, and asked what was become of her hat. Ap-Llymry came out in great haste, and invited Mr. Chainmail to walk in and dine: Mr. Chainmail did not wait to be asked twice. In a few minutes the whole party, Miss Susan and Mr. Chainmail, Mr. and Mrs. Ap-Llymry, and progeny, were seated over a clean home-spun tablecloth, ornamented with fowls and bacon, a pyramid of potatoes, another of cabbage, which Ap-Llymry said "was poiled with the pacon, and as coot as marrow," a bowl of milk for the children, and an immense brown jug of foaming ale, with which Ap-Llymry seemed to delight in filling the horn of his new guest.

Shall we describe the spacious apartment, which was at once kitchen, hall, and dining-room—the large dark rafters, the pendent bacon and onions, the strong, old, oaken furniture, the bright and trimly arranged utensils? Shall we describe the cut of Ap-Llymry's coat, the colour and tie of his neck-cloth, the number of buttons at his knees—the structure of Mrs. Ap-Llymry's cap, having lappets over the ears, which were united under the chin, setting forth especially whether the bond of union were a pin or a ribbon? We shall leave this tempting field of interesting expatiation to those whose brains are high-pressure steam engines for spinning prose by the furlong, to be trumpeted in paid-for paragraphs in the quack's corner of newspapers: modern literature having attained the honourable distinction of sharing with blacking and Macassar oil, the space which used to be monopolised by razor-strops and the lottery; whereby that very enlightened community, the reading public, is tricked into the perusal of much exemplary nonsense; though the few who see through the trickery have no reason to complain, since as "good wine needs no bush," so, *ex vi oppositi*, these bushes of venal panegyric point out very clearly that the things they celebrate are not worth reading.

The party dined very comfortably in a corner most remote from the fire; and Mr. Chainmail very soon found his head swimming with two or three horns of ale, of a potency to which even he was unaccustomed. After dinner, Ap-Llymry made him finish a bottle of mead, which he willingly accepted, both as an excuse to remain, and as a drink of the dark ages, which he had no doubt was a genuine brewage, from uncorrupted tradition.

In the meantime, as soon as the cloth was removed, the children had brought out Miss Susannah's harp. She began, without affectation, to play and sing to the children, as was her custom of an afternoon, first in their own language, and their national melodies, then in English; but she was soon interrupted by a general call of little voices for "Ouf! di giorno." She complied with the request, and sang the ballad from Paër's *Camilla:* "Un dì carco il mulinaro." * The children were very familiar with every syllable of this ballad, which had been often fully explained to them. They danced in a circle with the burden of every verse, shouting out the chorus with good articulation and joyous energy; and at the end of the second stanza, where the traveller has his nose pinched by his grandmother's ghost, every nose in the party was nipped by a pair of little fingers. Mr. Chainmail, who was not prepared for the process, came in for a very energetic tweak, from a chubby girl that sprang suddenly on his knees for the purpose, and made the roof ring with her laughter.

So passed the time till evening, when Mr. Chainmail moved to depart. But it turned out on inquiry, that he was some miles from his inn, that the way was intricate, and that he must not make any difficulty about accepting the farmer's hospitality till morning. The evening set in with rain: the fire was found agreeable; they drew around it. The young lady made tea; and afterwards, from time to time, at Mr. Chainmail's special request, delighted his ear with passages of ancient music. Then came a supper of lake trout, fried on the spot, and thrown, smoking hot, from the pan to the plate. Then came a brewage, which the farmer called his nightcap, of which he insisted on Mr. Chainmail's taking his full share. After which, the gentleman remembered nothing, till he awoke, the next morning, to the pleasant consciousness, that he was under the same roof with one of the most fascinating creatures under the canopy of heaven.

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* In this ballad, the terrors of the Black Forest are narrated to an assemblage of domestics and peasants, who, at the end of every stanza, dance in a circle round the narrator. The second stanza is as follows:

Una notte in un stradotto
Un incauto s'inoltrò;
E uno strillo udì di botto
Che l'orecchio gl'intronò:
Era l'ombra di sua nonna,
Che pel naso lo pigliò.
  Ouf! di giorno nè di sera,
Non passiam la selva nera.
          [*Ballano in giro.*

V

THE NEWSPAPER

Ποίας δ' ἀποσπασθεῖσα φύτλας
’Ορέων κευθμῶνας ἔχει σκιοέντων;

Sprung from what line, adorns the maid
These valleys deep in mountain shade?
Pind. *Pyth. ix.*

Mr. Chainmail forgot the captain and the route of Giraldus de Barri. He became suddenly satisfied that the ruined castle in his present neighbourhood was the best possible specimen of its class, and that it was needless to carry his researches further.

He visited the farm daily: found himself always welcome; flattered himself that the young lady saw him with pleasure, and dragged a heavier chain at every new parting from Miss Susan, as the children called his nymph of the mountains. What might be her second name, he had vainly endeavoured to discover.

Mr. Chainmail was in love: but the determination he had long before formed and fixed in his mind, to marry only a lady of gentle blood, without a blot in her escutcheon, repressed the declarations of passion which were often rising to his lips. In the meantime, he left no means untried, to pluck out the heart of her mystery.

The young lady soon divined his passion, and penetrated his prejudices. She began to look on him with favourable eyes; but she feared her name and parentage would present an insuperable barrier to his feudal pride.

Things were in this state when the captain returned, and unpacked his maps and books in the parlour of the inn.

Mr. Chainmail. Really, captain, I find so many objects of attraction in this neighbourhood, that I would gladly postpone our purpose.

Capt. Fitzchrome. Undoubtedly, this neighbourhood has many attractions; but there is something very inviting in the scheme you laid down.

Mr. Chainmail. No doubt, there is something very tempting in the route of Giraldus de Barri. But there are better things in this vicinity even than that. To tell you the truth, captain, I have fallen in love.

Capt. Fitzchrome. What! while I have been away?

Mr. Chainmail. Even so.

Capt. Fitzchrome. The plunge must have been very sudden, if you are already over head and ears.

Mr. Chainmail. As deep as Llyn-y-dreiddiad-vrawd.

Capt. Fitzchrome. And what may that be?

Mr. Chainmail. A pool not far off: a resting-place of a mountain stream which is said to have no bottom. There is a tradition connected with it; and here is a ballad on it, at your service.

LLYN-Y-DREIDDIAD-VRAWD

THE POOL OF THE DIVING FRIAR

Gwenwynwyn withdrew from the feasts of his hall:
He slept very little, he prayed not at all:
He pondered, and wandered, and studied alone;
And sought, night and day, the philosopher's stone.

He found it at length, and he made its first proof
By turning to gold all the lead of his roof:
Then he bought some magnanimous heroes, all fire,
Who lived but to smite and be smitten for hire.

With these, on the plains like a torrent he broke;
He filled the whole country with flame and with smoke;
He killed all the swine, and he broached all the wine;
He drove off the sheep, and the beeves, and the kine;

He took castles and towns; he cut short limbs and lives;
He made orphans and widows of children and wives:
This course many years he triumphantly ran,
And did mischief enough to be called a great man.

When, at last, he had gained all for which he had striven,
He bethought him of buying a passport to heaven;
Good and great as he was, yet he did not well know,
How soon, or which way, his great spirit might go.

He sought the grey friars, who, beside a wild stream,
Refected their frames on a primitive scheme;
The gravest and wisest Gwenwynwyn found out,
All lonely and ghostly, and angling for trout.

Below the white dash of a mighty cascade,
Where a pool of the stream a deep resting-place made,
And rock-rooted oaks stretched their branches on high,
The friar stood musing, and throwing his fly.

To him said Gwenwynwyn: "Hold, father, here's store,
For the good of the church, and the good of the poor";
Then he gave him the stone; but, ere more he could speak,
Wrath came on the friar, so holy and meek:

He had stretched forth his hand to receive the red gold,
And he thought himself mocked by Gwenwynwyn the Bold;
And in scorn of the gift, and in rage at the giver,
He jerked it immediately into the river.

Gwenwynwyn, aghast, not a syllable spake;
The philosopher's stone made a duck and a drake:
Two systems of circles a moment were seen,
And the stream smoothed them off, as they never had been.

Gwenwynwyn regained, and uplifted his voice:
"O friar, grey friar, full rash was thy choice;
The stone, the good stone, which away thou hast thrown,
Was the stone of all stones, the philosopher's stone!"

The friar looked pale, when his error he knew;
The friar looked red, and the friar looked blue;
And heels over head, from the point of a rock,
He plunged, without stopping to pull off his frock.

He dived very deep, but he dived all in vain,
The prize he had slighted he found not again:
Many times did the friar his diving renew,
And deeper and deeper the river still grew.

Gwenwynwyn gazed long, of his senses in doubt,
To see the grey friar a diver so stout:
Then sadly and slowly his castle he sought,
And left the friar diving, like dabchick distraught.

Gwenwynwyn fell sick with alarm and despite,
Died, and went to the devil, the very same night:
The magnanimous heroes he held in his pay,
Sacked his castle, and marched with the plunder away.

No knell on the silence of midnight was rolled,
For the flight of the soul of Gwenwynwyn the Bold:
The brethren, unfed, let the mighty ghost pass,
Without praying a prayer, or intoning a mass.

The friar haunted ever beside the dark stream;
The philosopher's stone was his thought and his dream:
And day after day, ever head under heels
He dived all the time he could spare from his meals.

He dived, and he dived, to the end of his days,
As the peasants oft witnessed with fear and amaze:
The mad friar's diving-place long was their theme,
And no plummet can fathom that pool of the stream.

And still, when light clouds on the midnight winds ride,
If by moonlight you stray on the lone riverside,
The ghost of the friar may be seen diving there,
With head in the water, and heels in the air.

Capt. Fitzchrome. Well, your ballad is very pleasant: you shall show me the scene, and I will sketch it; but just now I am more interested about your love. What heroine of the twelfth century has risen from the ruins of the old castle, and looked down on you from the ivied battlements?

Mr. Chainmail. You are nearer the mark than you suppose. Even from those battlements, a heroine of the twelfth century has looked down on me.

Capt. Fitzchrome. Oh! some vision of an ideal beauty. I suppose the whole will end in another tradition and a ballad.

Mr. Chainmail. Genuine flesh and blood; as genuine as Lady Clarinda. I will tell you the story.

Mr. Chainmail narrated his adventures.

Capt. Fitzchrome. Then you seem to have found what you wished. Chance has thrown in your way what none of the gods would have ventured to promise you.

Mr. Chainmail. Yes, but I know nothing of her birth and parentage. She tells me nothing of herself, and I have no right to question her directly.

Capt. Fitzchrome. She appears to be expressly destined for the light of your baronial hall. Introduce me: in this case, two heads are better than one.

Mr. Chainmail. No, I thank you. Leave me to manage my chance of a prize, and keep you to your own chance of a——

Capt. Fitzchrome. Blank. As you please. Well, I will pitch my tent here, till I have filled my portfolio, and shall be glad of as much of your company as you can spare from more attractive society.

Matters went on pretty smoothly for several days, when an unlucky newspaper threw all into confusion. Mr. Chainmail received newspapers by the post, which came in three times a week. One morning, over their half-finished breakfast, the captain had read half a newspaper very complacently, when suddenly he started up in a frenzy, hurled over the breakfast-table, and, bouncing from the apartment, knocked down Harry Ap-Heather, who was coming in at the door to challenge his supposed rival to a boxing-match.

Harry sprang up, in a double rage, and intercepted Mr. Chainmail's pursuit of the captain, placing himself in the doorway, in a pugilistic attitude. Mr. Chainmail, not being disposed for this mode of combat, stepped back into the parlour, took the poker in his right hand, and displacing the loose bottom of a large elbow chair, threw it over his left arm, as a shield. Harry, not liking the aspect of the enemy in this imposing attitude, retreated with backward steps into the kitchen, and tumbled over a cur, which immediately fastened on his rear.

Mr. Chainmail, half-laughing, half-vexed, anxious to overtake the captain, and curious to know what was the matter with him, pocketed the newspaper, and sallied forth, leaving Harry roaring for a doctor and tailor, to repair the lacerations of his outward man.

Mr. Chainmail could find no trace of the captain. Indeed, he sought him but in one direction, which was that leading to the farm; where he arrived in due time, and found Miss Susan alone. He laid the newspaper on the table, as was his custom, and proceeded to converse with the young lady: a conversation of many pauses, as much of signs as of words. The young lady took up the paper, and turned it over and over, while she listened to Mr. Chainmail, whom she found every day more and more agreeable, when, suddenly, her eye glanced on something which made her change colour, and dropping the paper on the ground, she rose from her seat, exclaiming: "Miserable must she be who trusts any of your faithless sex! never, never, never, will I endure such misery twice." And she vanished up the stairs. Mr. Chainmail was petrified. At length, he cried aloud: "Cornelius Agrippa must have laid a spell on this accursed newspaper"; and was turning it over, to look for the source of the mischief, when Mrs. Ap-Llymry made her appearance.

Mrs. Ap-Llymry. What have you done to poor dear Miss Susan? She is crying ready to break her heart.

Mr. Chainmail. So help me the memory of Richard Cœur de Lion, I have not the most distant notion of what is the matter.

Mrs. Ap-Llymry. Oh, don't tell me, sir; you must have ill-used her. I know how it is. You have been keeping company with her, as if you wanted to marry her; and now, all at once, you have been trying to make her your mistress. I have seen such tricks more than once, and you ought to be ashamed of yourself.

Mr. Chainmail. My dear madam, you wrong me utterly. I have none but the kindest feelings, and the most honourable purposes towards her. She has been disturbed by something she has seen in this rascally paper.

Mrs. Ap-Llymry. Why, then, the best thing you can do is to go away, and come again to-morrow.

Mr. Chainmail. Not I, indeed, madam. Out of this house I stir not, till I have seen the young lady, and obtained a full explanation.

Mrs. Ap-Llymry. I will tell Miss Susan what you say. Perhaps she will come down.

Mr. Chainmail sate with as much patience as he could command, running over the paper, from column to column. At length, he lighted on an announcement of the approaching marriage of Lady Clarinda Bossnowl with Mr. Crotchet the younger. This explained the captain's discomposure, but the cause of Miss Susan's was still to be sought: he could not know that it was one and the same.

Presently, the sound of the longed-for step was heard on the stairs; the young lady reappeared, and resumed her seat: her eyes showed that she had been weeping. The gentleman was now exceedingly puzzled how to begin, but the young lady relieved him by asking, with great simplicity: "What do you wish to have explained, sir?"

MR. CHAINMAIL. I wish, if I may be permitted, to explain myself to you. Yet could I first wish to know what it was that disturbed you in this unlucky paper. Happy should I be if I could remove the cause of your inquietude!

MISS SUSANNAH. The cause is already removed. I saw something that excited painful recollections; nothing that I could now wish otherwise than as it is.

MR. CHAINMAIL. Yet, may I ask why it is that I find one so accomplished, living in this obscurity, and passing only by the name of Miss Susan?

MISS SUSANNAH. The world and my name are not friends. I have left the world, and wish to remain for ever a stranger to all whom I once knew in it.

MR. CHAINMAIL. You can have done nothing to dishonour your name.

MISS SUSANNAH. No, sir. My father has done that of which the world disapproves, in matters of which I pretend not to judge. I have suffered for it as I will never suffer again. My name is my own secret: I have no other, and that is one not worth knowing. You see what I am, and all I am. I live according to the condition of my present fortune, and here, so living, I have found tranquillity.

MR. CHAINMAIL. Yet, I entreat you, tell me your name.

MISS SUSANNAH. Why, sir?

MR. CHAINMAIL. Why, but to throw my hand, my heart, my fortune, at your feet, if——

MISS SUSANNAH. If my name be worthy of them.

MR. CHAINMAIL. Nay, nay, not so; if your hand and heart are free.

MISS SUSANNAH. My hand and heart are free; but they must be sought from myself, and not from my name.

She fixed her eyes on him, with a mingled expression of mistrust, of kindness, and of fixed resolution, which the far-gone *innamorato* found irresistible.

MR. CHAINMAIL. Then from yourself alone I seek them.

Miss Susannah. Reflect. You have prejudices on the score of parentage. I have not conversed with you so often, without knowing what they are. Choose between them and me. I too have my own prejudices on the score of personal pride.

Mr. Chainmail. I would choose you from all the world, were you even the daughter of the *exécuteur des hautes œuvres*, as the heroine of a romantic story I once read, turned out to be.

Miss Susannah. I am satisfied. You have now a right to know my history, and if you repent, I absolve you from all obligations.

She told him her history; but he was out of the reach of repentance. "It is true," as at a subsequent period he said to the captain, "she is the daughter of a money-changer; one who, in the days of Richard the First, would have been plucked by the beard in the streets: but she is, according to modern notions, a lady of gentle blood. As to her father's running away, that is a minor consideration: I have always understood, from Mr. MacQuedy, who is a great oracle in this way, that promises to pay ought not to be kept; the essence of a safe and economical currency being an interminable series of broken promises. There seems to be a difference among the learned as to the way in which the promises ought to be broken; but I am not deep enough in their casuistry to enter into such nice distinctions."

In a few days there was a wedding, a pathetic leave-taking of the farmer's family, a hundred kisses from the bride to the children, and promises twenty times reclaimed and renewed, to visit them in the ensuing year.

MARY RUSSELL MITFORD

(1787–1855)

MISS MITFORD'S activities were distributed over several branches of the writer's craft. Publishing in 1810 a volume of *Miscellaneous Poems*, she wrote largely for the periodicals, contributing to the *Lady's Magazine* a series of sketches of country life under the general title of *Our Village*. In 1828 her bent turned toward the drama, and she published the tragedy entitled *Rienzi* (1828). Her *Atherton* (1854) won high praise from Ruskin, and there is no doubt that in her magazine contributions she originated a style never before attempted and one that was peculiarly her own.

"The Village Schoolmistress" is reprinted from *Our Village* (the five volumes of which were first collected in 1824–32).

THE VILLAGE SCHOOLMISTRESS

WOMEN, fortunately perhaps for their happiness and their virtue, have, as compared with men, so few opportunities of acquiring permanent distinction, that it is rare to find a female unconnected with literature or with history, whose name is remembered after her monument is defaced, and the brass on her coffin-lid corroded. Such, however, was the case with Dame Eleanor, the widow of Sir Richard Lacy, whose name at the end of three centuries, continued to be as freshly and as frequently spoken, as "familiar" a "household word" in the little village of Aberleigh, as if she had flourished there yesterday. Her memory was embalmed by a deed of charity and of goodness. She had founded and endowed a girls' school for "the instruction" (to use the words of the deed) "of twenty poor children, and the maintenance of one discreet and godly matron"; and the school still continued to be called after its foundress, and the very spot on which the schoolhouse stood, to be known by the name of Lady Lacy's Green.

It was a spot worthy of its destination—a spot of remarkable cheerfulness and beauty. The Green was small, of irregular shape, and situate at a confluence of shady lanes. Half the roads and paths of the parish met there, probably for the convenience of crossing, in that place by a stone bridge of one arch covered with ivy, the winding rivulet which intersected the whole village, and which, sweeping in a narrow channel round the school garden, widened into a stream of some consequence, in the richly wooded meadows beyond. The banks of the brook, as it wound its glittering course over the Green, were set, here and there, with clumps of forest trees, chiefly bright green elms, and aspens with their quivering leaves and their pale shining bark; whilst a magnificent beech stood alone near the gate leading to the school, partly overshadowing the little court in which the house was placed. The building itself was a beautiful small structure, in the ornamented style of Elizabeth's day, with pointed roofs and pinnacles, and clustered chimneys, and casement windows; the whole house enwreathed and garlanded by a most luxuriant vine. The date of the erection, 1563, was cut in a stone inserted in the brick-work above the porch: but the foundress had, with an unostentatious modesty, withheld her name; leaving it, as she safely might, to the grateful recollection of the successive generations who profited by her benevolence. Altogether it was a most gratifying scene to the eye and to the heart. No one ever saw Lady Lacy's schoolhouse without admiration, especially in the play-hour at noon, when the children, freed from "restraint that sweetens liberty," were clustered under the old beech tree, revelling in their innocent freedom, running, jumping, shouting, and laughing with all their might; the only sort of riot which it is pleasant to witness. The painter and the philanthropist might contemplate that scene with equal delight.

The right of appointing both the mistress and the scholars had been originally vested in the Lacy family, to whom nearly the whole of the parish had at one time belonged. But the estates, the manor, the hall-house had long passed into other hands and other names, and this privilege of charity was now the only possession which the heirs of Lady Lacy retained in Aberleigh. Reserving to themselves the right of nominating the matron, her descendants had therefore delegated to the vicar and the parish officers the selection of the children, and the general regulation of the school—a sort of council of regency, which, for as simple and as peaceful as the government seems, a disputatious churchwarden or a sturdy overseer would sometimes contrive to render sufficiently stormy. I have known as much canvassing and almost as much ill-will in a contested election for one of Lady Lacy's scholarships, as for a scholarship in grander places, or even for an M.P.-ship in the next borough; and the great schism between the late Farmer Brookes and all his coadjutors, as to whether the original uniform of little green stuff gowns, with white bibs and aprons, tippets and mob, should be commuted for modern cotton frocks and cottage bonnets, fairly set the parish by the ears. Owing to the good farmer's glorious obstinacy (which I suppose he called firmness), the green-gownians lost the day. I believe that as a matter of calculation, the man might be right, and that his costume was cheaper and more convenient; but I am sure that I should have been against him, right or wrong: the other dress was so pretty, so primitive, so neat, so becoming; the little lasses looked like rosebuds in the midst of their leaves: besides, it was the old traditionary dress—the dress contrived and approved by Lady Lacy. Oh! it should never have been changed, never!

Since there was so much contention in the election of pupils, it was perhaps lucky for the vestry that the exercise of the more splendid piece of patronage, the appointment of a mistress, did not enter into its duties. Mr. Lacy, the representative of the foundress, a man of fortune in a distant county, generally bestowed the situation on some old dependent of his family. During the churchwardenship of Farmer Brookes, no less than three village *gouvernantes* arrived at Aberleigh—a quick succession! It made more than half the business of our zealous and bustling man of office, an amateur in such matters, to instruct and overlook them. The first importation was Dame Whitaker, a person of no small importance, who had presided as head nurse over two generations of the Lacys, and was now, on the dispersion of the last set of her nurslings to their different schools, and an unlucky quarrel with a favourite lady's maid, promoted and banished to this distant government. Nobody could well be more unfit for her new station, or better suited to her old. She was a nurse from top to toe. Round, portly, smiling, with a coaxing voice, and an indolent manner; much addicted to snuff and green tea, to sitting still, to telling long stories, and to humouring children. She spoiled every brat she came near, just as she had been used to spoil the little Master Edwards and Miss Julias of her ancient dominions. She could not have scolded if she would—the gift was not in her. Under her misrule the school grew into sad disorder; the girls not only learnt nothing, but unlearnt what they knew before; work was lost—even the new shifts of the Vicar's lady; books were torn; and, for the climax of evil, no sampler was prepared to carry round at Christmas, from house to house—the first time such an omission had occurred within the memory of man. Farmer Brookes was at his wit's end. He visited the school six days in the week, to admonish and reprove; he even went nigh to threaten that he would work a sampler himself; and finally bestowed on the unfortunate ex-nurse, the nickname of Queen Log, a piece of disrespect, which, together with other grievances, proved so annoying to poor Dame Whitaker, that she found the air of Aberleigh disagreed with her, patched up a peace with her old enemy, the lady's maid, abdicated that unruly and rebellious principality, the school, and retired with great delight to her quiet home in the deserted nursery, where, as far as I know she still remains.

The grief of the children on losing this most indulgent non-instructress, was not mitigated by the appearance or demeanour of her successor, who at first seemed a preceptress after Farmer Brookes's own heart, a perfect Queen Stork. Dame Banks was the widow of Mr. Lacy's gamekeeper; a little thin woman, with a hooked nose, a sharp voice, and a prodigious activity of tongue. She scolded all day long; and, for the first week, passed for a great teacher. After that time it began to be discovered, that, in spite of her lessons, the children did not learn; notwithstanding her rating they did not mind, and in the midst of a continual bustle nothing was ever done. Dame Banks was in fact a well-intentioned, worthy woman, with a restless irritable temper, a strong desire to do her duty, and a woeful ignorance how to set about it. She was rather too old to be taught either; at least she required a gentler instructor than the good churchwarden; and so much ill-will was springing up between them, that he had even been heard to regret the loss of Dame Whitaker's quietness, when very suddenly poor Dame Banks fell ill, and died. The sword had worn the scabbard; but she was better than she seemed; a thoroughly well-meaning woman—grateful, pious, and charitable; even our man of office admitted this.

The next in succession was one with whom my trifling pen, dearly as that light and fluttering instrument loves to dally and disport over the surfaces of things, must take no saucy freedom; one of whom we all felt it impossible to speak or to think without respect; one who made Farmer Brookes's office of adviser a sinecure, by putting the whole school, himself included, into its proper place, setting everybody in order, and keeping them so. I don't know how she managed, unless by good sense and good humour, and that happy art of government, which seems no art at all, because it is so perfect; but the children were busy and happy, the vestry pleased, and the churchwarden contented. All went well under Mrs. Allen.

She was an elderly woman, nearer perhaps to seventy than to sixty, and of an exceedingly venerable and prepossessing appearance. Delicacy was her chief characteristic—a delicacy so complete that it pervaded her whole person, from her tall, slender figure, her fair, faded complexion, and her silver hair, to the exquisite nicety of dress, by which, at all hours and seasons, from Sunday morning to Saturday night, she was invariably distinguished. The soil of the day was never seen on her apparel; dust would not cling to her snowy caps and handkerchiefs: such was the art magic of her neatness. Her very pins did their office in a different manner from those belonging to other people. Her manner was gentle, cheerful, and courteous, with a simplicity and propriety of expression that perplexed all listeners; it seemed so exactly what belongs to the highest birth and the highest breeding. She was humble, very humble; but her humility was evidently the result of a truly Christian spirit, and would equally have distinguished her in any station. The poor people, always nice judges of behaviour, felt, they did not know why, that she was their superior; the gentry of the neighbourhood suspected her to be their equal—some clergyman's or officer's widow, reduced in circumstances; and would have treated her as such, had she not, on discovering their mistake, eagerly undeceived them. She had been, she said, all her life a servant, the personal attendant of one dear mistress, on whose decease she had been recommended to Mr. Lacy; and to his kindness, under Providence, was indebted for a home and a provision for her helpless age, and the still more helpless youth of a poor orphan, far dearer to her than herself. This avowal, although it changed the character of the respect paid to Mrs. Allen, was certainly not calculated to diminish its amount; and the new mistress of Lady Lacy's school, and the beautiful order of her house and garden, continued to be the pride and admiration of Aberleigh.

The orphan of whom she spoke was a little girl about eleven years old, who lived with her, and whose black frock bespoke the recent death of some relative. She had lately, Mrs. Allen said, lost her grandmother—her only remaining parent, and had now no friend but herself on earth; but there was one above who was a Father to the fatherless, and he would protect poor Jane! And as she said this, there was a touch of emotion, a break of the voice, a tremor on the lip, very unlike the usual cheerfulness and self-command of her manner. The child was evidently very dear to her. Jane was, indeed, a most interesting creature: not pretty—a girl of that age seldom is; the beauty of childhood is outgrown, that of youth not come; and Jane could scarcely ever have had any other pretensions to prettiness, than the fine expression of her dark grey eyes, and the general sweetness of her countenance. She was pale, thin, and delicate; serious and thoughtful far beyond her years; averse from play, and shrinking from notice. Her fondness for Mrs. Allen, and her constant and unremitting attention to her health and comforts, were peculiarly remarkable. Every part of their small housewifery, that her height and strength and skill would enable her to perform, she insisted on doing, and many things far beyond her power she attempted. Never was so industrious or so handy a little maiden. Old Nelly Chun, the charwoman, who went once a week to the house, to wash and bake and scour, declared that Jane did more than herself; and to all who knew Nelly's opinion of her own doings, this praise appeared superlative.

In the schoolroom she was equally assiduous, not as a learner, but as a teacher. None so clever as Jane in superintending the different exercises of the needle, the spelling-book, and the slate. From the little work-woman's first attempt to insert thread into a pocket handkerchief, that digging and ploughing of cambric, miscalled hemming, up to the nice and delicate mysteries of stitching and button-holing; from the easy junction of *a b*, *ab*, and *b a*, *ba*, to that tremendous sesquipedalian word *irrefragability*, at which even I tremble as I write; from the Numeration Table to Practice, nothing came amiss to her. In figures she was particularly quick. Generally speaking, her patience with the other children, however dull or tiresome or giddy they might be, was exemplary; but a false accomptant, a stupid arithmetician, would put her out of humour. The only time I ever heard her sweet gentle voice raised a note above its natural key, was in reprimanding Susan Wheeler, a sturdy, square-made, rosy-cheeked lass, as big again as herself, the dunce and beauty of the school, who had three times cast up a sum of three figures, and three times made the total wrong. Jane ought to have admired the ingenuity evinced by such a variety of error; but she did not; it fairly put her in a passion.

She herself was not only clever in figures, but fond of them to an extraordinary degree—luxuriated in Long Division, and revelled in the Rule-of-Three. Had she been a boy, she would probably have been a great mathematician, and have won that fickle, fleeting, shadowy wreath, that crown made of the rainbow, that vainest of all earthly pleasures, but which yet *is* a pleasure—Fame.

Happier, far happier was the good, the lowly, the pious child, in her humble duties! Grave and quiet as she seemed, she had many moments of intense and placid enjoyment, when the duties of the day were over, and she sat reading in the porch, by the side of Mrs. Allen, or walked with her in the meadows on a Sunday evening after church. Jane was certainly contented and happy; and yet every one that saw her, thought of her with that kind of interest which is akin to pity. There was a pale, fragile grace about her, such as we sometimes see in a rose which has blown in the shade; or rather, to change the simile, the drooping and delicate look of a tender plant removed from a hothouse to the open air. We could not help feeling sure (notwithstanding our mistake with regard to Mrs. Allen) that *this* was indeed a transplanted flower; and that the village school, however excellently her habits had become inured to her situation, was not her proper atmosphere.

Several circumstances corroborated our suspicions. My lively young friend Sophia Grey, standing with me one day at the gate of the schoolhouse, where I had been talking with Mrs. Allen, remarked to me, in French, the sly, demure vanity, with which Susan Wheeler, whose beauty had attracted her attention, was observing and returning her glances. The playful manner in which Sophia described Susan's "*regard furtif*," made me smile; and looking accidentally at Jane, I saw that she was smiling too, clearly comprehending, and enjoying the full force of the pleasantry. She must understand French; and when questioned, she confessed she did, and thankfully accepted the loan of books in that language. Another time, being sent on a message to the vicarage, and left for some minutes alone in the parlour, with a piano standing open in the room, she could not resist the temptation of touching the keys, and was discovered playing an air of Mozart, with great taste and execution. At this detection she blushed, as if caught in a crime, and hurried away in tears and without her message. It was clear that she had once learnt music. But the surest proof that Jane's original station had been higher than that which she now filled, was the mixture of respect and fondness with which Mrs. Allen treated her, and the deep regret she sometimes testified at seeing her employed in any menial office.

At last, elicited by some warm praise of the charming child, our good schoolmistress disclosed her story. Jane Mowbray was the granddaughter of the lady in whose service Mrs. Allen had passed her life. Her father had been a man of high family and splendid fortune; had married beneath himself, as it was called, a friendless orphan, with no portion but beauty and virtue; and, on her death, which followed shortly on the birth of her daughter, had plunged into every kind of vice and extravagance. What need to tell a tale of sin and suffering? Mr. Mowbray had ruined himself, had ruined all belonging to him, and finally had joined our armies abroad as a volunteer, and had fallen undistinguished in his first battle. The news of his death was fatal to his indulgent mother; and when she too died, Mrs. Allen blessed the Providence which, by throwing in her way a recommendation to Lady Lacy's school, had enabled her to support the dear object of her mistress's love and prayers. "Had Miss Mowbray no connexions?" was the natural question. "Yes; one, very near—an aunt, the sister of her father, richly married in India. But Sir William was a proud, a stern man, upright in his own conduct, and implacable to error. Lady Ely was a sweet, gentle creature, and doubtless would be glad to extend a mother's protection to the orphan; but Sir William— Oh! he was so unrelenting! he had abjured Mr. Mowbray, and all connected with him. She had written to inform them where the dear child was, but had no expectation of any answer from India."

Time verified this prediction. The only tidings from India, at all interesting to Jane Mowbray, were contained in the paragraph of a newspaper which announced Lady Ely's death, and put an end to all hopes of protection in that quarter. Years passed on, and found her still with Mrs. Allen at Lady Lacy's Green, more and more beloved and respected from day to day. She had now attained almost to womanhood. Strangers, I believe, called her plain; we, who knew her, called her pretty. Her figure was tall and straight as a cypress, pliant and flexible as a willow, full of gentle grace, whether in repose or in motion. She had a profusion of light brown hair, a pale complexion, dark grey eyes, a smile of which the character was rather sweet than gay, and such a countenance! no one could look at her without wishing her well, or without being sure that she deserved all good wishes. Her manners were modest and elegant, and she had much of the self-taught knowledge, which is, of all knowledge, the surest and the best, because acquired with much difficulty, and fixed in the memory by the repetition of effort. Every one had assisted her to the extent of his power, and of her willingness to accept assistance; for both she and Mrs. Allen had a pride—call it independence—which rendered it impossible, even to the friends who were most honoured by their good opinion, to be as useful to them as they could have wished. To give Miss Mowbray time for improvement had, however, proved a powerful emollient to the pride of our dear schoolmistress; and that time had been so well employed, that her acquirements were considerable; whilst in mind and character she was truly admirable; mild, grateful, and affectionate, and imbued with a deep religious feeling, which influenced every action and pervaded every thought. So gifted, she was deemed by her constant friends, the vicar and his lady, perfectly competent to the care and education of children; it was agreed that she should enter a neighbouring family, as a successor to their then governess, early in the ensuing spring; and she, although sad at the prospect of leaving her aged protectress, acquiesced in their decision.

One fine Sunday in the October preceding this dreaded separation, as Miss Mowbray, with Mrs. Allen leaning on her arm, was slowly following the little train of Lady Lacy's scholars from church, an elderly gentleman, sickly-looking and emaciated, accosted a pretty young woman, who was loitering with some other girls at the churchyard gate, and asked her several questions respecting the school and its mistress. Susan Wheeler (for it happened to be our old acquaintance) was delighted to be singled out by so grand a gentleman, and being a kind-hearted creature in the main, spoke of the schoolhouse and its inhabitants exactly as they deserved. "Mrs. Allen," she said, "was the best woman in the world—the very best, except just Miss Mowbray, who was better still—only too particular about summing, which you know, sir," added Susan, "people can't learn if they can't. She is going to be a governess in the spring," continued the loquacious damsel; "and it's to be hoped the little ladies will take kindly to their tables, or it will be a sad grievance to Miss Jane."—"A governess! Where can I make inquiries concerning Miss Mowbray?"—"At the vicarage, sir," answered Susan, dropping her little curtsy, and turning away, well pleased with the gentleman's condescension, and with half a crown which he had given her in return for her intelligence. The stranger, meanwhile, walked straight to the vicarage: and in less than half an hour the vicar repaired with him to Lady Lacy's Green.

This stranger, so drooping, so sickly, so emaciated, was the proud Indian uncle, the stern Sir William Ely! Sickness and death had been busy with him and his. He had lost his health, his wife, and his children; and, softened by affliction, was returned to England a new man, anxious to forgive and to be forgiven, and, above all, desirous to repair his neglect and injustice toward the only remaining relative of the wife whom he had so fondly loved and so tenderly lamented. In this frame of mind, such a niece as Jane Mowbray was welcomed with no common joy. His delight in her, and his gratitude toward her protectress, were unbounded. He wished them both to accompany him home, and reside with him constantly. Jane promised to do so; but Mrs. Allen, with her usual admirable feeling of propriety, clung to the spot which had been to her a "city of refuge," and refused to leave it in spite of all the entreaties of uncle and niece. It was a happy decision for Aberleigh; for what could Aberleigh have done without its good schoolmistress?

She lives there still, its ornament and its pride; and every year Jane Mowbray comes for a long visit, and makes a holiday in the school and in the whole place. Jane Mowbray, did I say? No! not Jane Mowbray now. She has changed that dear name for the only name that could be dearer:—she is married—married to the eldest son of Mr. Lacy, the lineal representative of Dame Eleanor Lacy, the honoured foundress of the school. It was in a voice tremulous more from feeling than from age, that Mrs. Allen welcomed the young heir, when he brought his fair bride to Aberleigh; and it was with a yet stronger and deeper emotion that the bridegroom, with his own Jane in his hand, visited the asylum which she and her venerable guardian owed to the benevolence and the piety of his ancestress, whose good deeds had thus showered down blessings on her remote posterity.

R. H. BARHAM

(1788–1845)

RICHARD HARRIS BARHAM, educated at St. Paul's School and Brasenose College, Oxford, was admitted to Holy Orders, and in 1821 was made Minor Canon of St. Paul's. He was next appointed priest-in-ordinary of the chapels royal in 1824. He lectured on divinity at St. Paul's, and was vicar of St. Faith's from 1842. Best known for his immortal *Ingoldsby Legends*, which first appeared in *Bentley's Miscellany* and *The New Monthly Magazine* (1838–9), he also produced other poems and short stories, all enlivened by the same sprightly wit and fertility of phrase and invention.

"Singular Passage in the Life of the late Henry Harris, Doctor in Divinity," is reprinted from *The Ingoldsby Legends.*

Singular Passage in the Life of

THE LATE HENRY HARRIS, DOCTOR IN DIVINITY,

As related by the Rev. Jasper Ingoldsby, M.A., his Friend and Executor

IN order that the extraordinary circumstance which I am about to relate, may meet with the credit it deserves, I think it necessary to premise, that my reverend friend, among whose papers I find it recorded, was, in his lifetime, ever esteemed as a man of good, plain understanding, strict veracity, and unimpeached morals—by no means of a nervous temperament, or one likely to attach undue weight to any occurrence out of the common course of events, merely because his reflections might not, at the moment, afford him a ready solution of its difficulties.

On the truth of his narrative, as far as he was personally concerned, no one who knew him would hesitate to place the most implicit reliance. His history is briefly this:—He had married early in life, and was a widower at the age of thirty-nine, with an only daughter, who had then arrived at puberty, and was just married to a near connexion of our own family. The sudden death of her husband, occasioned by a fall from his horse, only three days after her confinement, was abruptly communicated to Mrs. S—— by a thoughtless girl, who saw her master brought lifeless into the house, and, with all that inexplicable anxiety to be the first to tell bad news, so common among the lower orders, rushed at once into the sick-room with her intelligence. The shock was too severe; and though the young widow survived the fatal event several months, yet she gradually sank under the blow, and expired, leaving a boy, not a twelvemonth old, to the care of his maternal grandfather.

My poor friend was sadly shaken by this melancholy catastrophe; time, however, and a strong religious feeling, succeeded at length in moderating the poignancy of his grief—a consummation much advanced by his infant charge, who now succeeded, as it were by inheritance, to the place in his affections left vacant by his daughter's decease. Frederick S—— grew up to be a fine lad; his person and features were decidedly handsome; still there was, as I remember, an unpleasant expression in his countenance, and an air of reserve, attributed, by the few persons who called occasionally at the vicarage, to the retired life led by his grandfather, and the little opportunity he had, in consequence, of mixing in the society of his equals in age and intellect. Brought up entirely at home, his progress in the common branches of education was, without any great display of precocity, rather in advance of the generality of boys of his own standing; partly owing, perhaps, to the turn which even his amusements took from the first. His sole associate was the son of the village apothecary, a boy about two years older than himself, whose father, being really clever in his profession, and a good operative chemist, had constructed for himself a small laboratory, in which, as he was fond of children, the two boys spent a great portion of their leisure time, witnessing many of those little experiments so attractive to youth, and in time aspiring to imitate what they admired.

In such society, it is not surprising that Frederick S—— should imbibe a strong taste for the sciences which formed his principal amusement; or that, when, in process of time, it became necessary to choose his walk in life, a profession so intimately connected with his favourite pursuit, as that of medicine, should be eagerly selected. No opposition was offered by my friend, who, knowing that the greater part of his own income would expire with his life, and that the remainder would prove an insufficient resource to his grandchild, was only anxious that he should follow such a path as would secure him that moderate and respectable competency which is, perhaps, more conducive to real happiness than a more elevated or wealthy station. Frederick was, accordingly, at the proper age, matriculated at Oxford, with the view of studying the higher branches of medicine, a few months after his friend, John W——, had proceeded to Leyden, for the purpose of making himself acquainted with the practice of surgery in the hospitals and lecture-rooms attached to that university. The boyish intimacy of their younger days did not, as is frequently the case, yield to separation; on the contrary, a close correspondence was kept up between them. Dr. Harris was even prevailed upon to allow Frederick to take a trip to Holland to see his friend; and John returned the visit to Frederick at Oxford.

Satisfactory as, for some time, were the accounts of the general course of Frederick S——'s studies, by degrees rumours of a less pleasant nature reached the ears of some of his friends; to the vicarage, however, I have reason to believe they never penetrated. The good old Doctor was too well beloved in his parish for anyone voluntarily to give him pain; and, after all, nothing beyond whispers and surmises had reached X——, when the worthy vicar was surprised on a sudden by a request from his grandchild, that he might be permitted to take his name off the books of the university, and proceed to finish his education in conjunction with his friend W—— at Leyden. Such a proposal, made, too, at a time when the period for his graduating could not be far distant, both surprised and grieved the Doctor; he combated the design with more perseverance than he had ever been known to exert in opposition to any declared wish of his darling boy before, but, as usual, gave way, when, more strongly pressed, from sheer inability to persist in a refusal which seemed to give so much pain to Frederick, especially when the latter, with more energy than was quite becoming their relative situations, expressed his positive determination of not returning to Oxford, whatever might be the result of his grandfather's decision. My friend, his mind, perhaps, a little weakened by a short but severe nervous attack from which he had scarcely recovered, at length yielded a reluctant consent, and Frederick quitted England.

It was not till some months had elapsed after his departure, that I had reason to suspect that the eager desire of availing himself of opportunities for study abroad, not afforded him at home, was not the sole, or even the principal, reason which had drawn Frederick so abruptly from his *Alma Mater*. A chance visit to the university, and a conversation with a senior fellow belonging to his late college, convinced me of this; still I found it impossible to extract from the latter the precise nature of his offence. That he had given way to most culpable indulgences I had before heard hinted; and when I recollected how he had been at once launched, from a state of what might be well called seclusion, into a world where so many enticements were lying in wait to allure—with liberty, example, everything to tempt him from the straight road—regret, I frankly own, was the more predominant feeling in my mind than either surprise or condemnation. But here was evidently something more than mere ordinary excess—some act of profligacy, perhaps of a deeper stain, which had induced his superiors, who, at first, had been loud in his praises, to desire him to withdraw himself quietly, but for ever; and such an intimation, I found, had, in fact, been conveyed to him from an authority which it was impossible to resist. Seeing that my informant was determined not to be explicit, I did not press for a disclosure, which, if made, would, in all probability, only have given me pain, and that the rather, as my old friend the Doctor had recently obtained a valuable living from Lord M——, only a few miles distant from the market town in which I resided, where he now was, amusing himself in putting his grounds into order, ornamenting his house, and getting everything ready against his grandson's expected visit in the following autumn. October came, and with it came Frederick; he rode over more than once to see me, sometimes accompanied by the Doctor, between whom and myself the recent loss of my poor daughter Louisa had drawn the cords of sympathy still closer.

More than two years had flown on in this way, in which Frederick S—— had as many times made temporary visits to his native country. The time was fast approaching when he was expected to return and finally take up his residence in England, when the sudden illness of my wife's father obliged us to take a journey into Lancashire, my old friend, who had himself a curate, kindly offering to fix his quarters at my parsonage, and superintend the concerns of my parish till my return. Alas! when I saw him next he was on the bed of death!

My absence was necessarily prolonged much beyond what I had anticipated. A letter, with a foreign post-mark, had, as I afterwards found, been brought over from his own house to my venerable substitute in the interval, and barely giving himself time to transfer the charge he had undertaken to a neighbouring clergyman, he had hurried off at once to Leyden. His arrival there was, however, too late. Frederick *was dead!*—killed in a duel, occasioned, it was said, by no ordinary provocation on his part, although the flight of his antagonist had added to the mystery which enveloped its origin. The long journey, its melancholy termination, and the complete overthrow of all my poor friend's earthly hopes, were too much for him. He appeared too—as I was informed by the proprietor of the house in which I found him, when his summons at length had brought me to his bedside—to have received some sudden and unaccountable shock, which even the death of his grandson was inadequate to explain. There was, indeed, a wildness in his fast-glazing eye, which mingled strangely with the glance of satisfaction thrown upon me as he pressed my hand; he endeavoured to raise himself, and would have spoken, but fell back in the effort, and closed his eyes for ever. I buried him there, by the side of the object of his more than parental affection—in a foreign land.

It is from the papers that I discovered in his travelling-case that I submit the following extracts, without, however, presuming to advance an opinion on the strange circumstances which they detail, or even as to the connexion which some may fancy they discover between different parts of them.

The first was evidently written at my own house, and bears date August the 15th, 18—, about three weeks after my own departure for Preston.

It begins thus:

"*Tuesday, August 15.*—Poor girl!—I forget who it is that says, 'The real ills of life are light in comparison with fancied evils'; and certainly the scene I have just witnessed goes some way towards establishing the truth of the hypothesis. Among the afflictions which flesh is heir to, a diseased imagination is far from being the lightest, even when considered separately, and without taking into the account those bodily pains and sufferings which—so close is the connexion between mind and matter—are but too frequently attendant upon any disorder of the fancy. Seldom has my interest been more powerfully excited than by poor Mary Graham. Her age, her appearance, her pale, melancholy features, the very contour of her countenance, all conspire to remind me, but too forcibly, of one who, waking or sleeping, is never long absent from my thoughts; but enough of this.

"A fine morning had succeeded one of the most tempestuous nights I ever remember, and I was just sitting down to a substantial breakfast, which the care of my friend Ingoldsby's housekeeper, kind-hearted Mrs. Wilson, had prepared for me, when I was interrupted by a summons to the sick-bed of a young parishioner whom I had frequently seen in my walks, and had remarked for the regularity of her attendance at Divine worship. Mary Graham is the elder of two daughters, residing with their mother, the widow of an attorney, who, dying suddenly in the prime of life, left his family but slenderly provided for. A strict though not parsimonious economy has, however, enabled them to live with an appearance of respectability and comfort; and from the personal attractions which both the girls possess, their mother is evidently not without hopes of seeing one, at least, of them advantageously settled in life. As far as poor Mary is concerned, I fear she is doomed to inevitable disappointment, as I am much mistaken if consumption has not laid its wasting finger upon her; while this last recurrence, of what I cannot but believe to be a formidable epileptic attack, threatens to shake out, with even added velocity, the little sand that may yet remain within the hour-glass of time. Her very delusion, too, is of such a nature as, by adding to bodily illness the agitation of superstitious terror, can scarcely fail to accelerate the catastrophe, which I think I see fast approaching.

"Before I was introduced into the sick-room, her sister, who had been watching my arrival from the window, took me into their little parlour, and, after the usual civilities, began to prepare me for the visit I was about to pay. Her countenance was marked at once with trouble and alarm, and in a low tone of voice, which some internal emotion, rather than the fear of disturbing the invalid in a distant room, had subdued almost to a whisper, informed me that my presence was become necessary, not more as a clergyman than a magistrate; that the disorder with which her sister had, during the night, been so suddenly and unaccountably seized, was one of no common kind, but attended with circumstances which, coupled with the declarations of the sufferer, took it out of all ordinary calculations, and, to use her own expression, that 'malice was at the bottom of it.'

"Naturally supposing that these insinuations were intended to intimate the partaking of some deleterious substance on the part of the invalid, I inquired what reason she had for imagining, in the first place, that anything of a poisonous nature had been administered at all; and, secondly, what possible incitement any human being could have for the perpetration of so foul a deed towards so innocent and unoffending an individual? Her answer considerably relieved the apprehensions I had begun to entertain lest the poor girl should, from some unknown cause, have herself been attempting to rush uncalled into the presence of her Creator; at the same time, it surprised me not a little by its apparent want of rationality and common sense. She had no reason to believe, she said, that her sister had taken poison, or that any attempt upon her life had been made, or was, perhaps, contemplated, but that 'still malice was at work—the malice of villains or fiends, or of both combined; that no causes purely natural would suffice to account for the state in which her sister had been now twice placed, or for the dreadful sufferings she had undergone while in that state'; and that she was determined the whole affair should undergo a thorough investigation. Seeing that the poor girl was now herself labouring under a great degree of excitement, I did not think it necessary to enter at that moment into a discussion upon the absurdity of her opinion, but applied myself to the tranquillising of her mind by assurances of a proper inquiry, and then drew her attention to the symptoms of the indisposition, and the way in which it had first made its appearance.

"The violence of the storm last night, had, I found, induced the whole family to sit up far beyond their usual hour, till, wearied out at length, and, as their mother observed, 'tired of burning fire and candle to no purpose,' they repaired to their several chambers.

"The sisters occupied the same room; Elizabeth was already at her humble toilet, and had commenced the arrangement of her hair for the night, when her attention was at once drawn from her employment by a half-smothered shriek and exclamation from her sister, who, in her delicate state of health, had found walking up two flights of stairs, perhaps a little more quickly than usual, an exertion, to recover from which she had seated herself in a large arm-chair.

"Turning hastily at the sound, she perceived Mary deadly pale, grasping as it were convulsively, each arm of the chair which supported her, and bending forward in the attitude of listening; her lips were trembling and bloodless, cold drops of perspiration stood upon her forehead, and in an instant after, exclaiming in a piercing tone, 'Hark! they are calling me again! it is—*it is the same voice;*—Oh, no, no!—Oh, my God! save me, Betsy—hold me—save me!' she fell forward upon the floor. Elizabeth flew to her assistance, raised her, and by her cries brought both her mother, who had not yet got into bed, and their only servant-girl, to her aid. The latter was dispatched at once for medical help; but, from the appearance of the sufferer, it was much to be feared that she would soon be beyond the reach of art. Her agonised parent and sister succeeded in bearing her between them and placing her on a bed: a faint and intermittent pulsation was for a while perceptible; but in a few moments a general shudder shook the whole body; the pulse ceased, the eyes became fixed and glassy, the jaw dropped, a cold clamminess usurped the place of the genial warmth of life. Before Mr. I—— arrived everything announced that dissolution had taken place, and that the freed spirit had quitted its mortal tenement.

"The appearance of the surgeon confirmed their worst apprehensions; a vein was opened, but the blood refused to flow, and Mr. I—— pronounced that the vital spark was indeed extinguished.

"The poor mother, whose attachment to her children was perhaps the more powerful, as they were the sole relatives or connexions she had in the world, was overwhelmed with a grief amounting almost to frenzy; it was with difficulty that she was removed to her own room by the united strength of her daughter and medical adviser. Nearly an hour had elapsed during the endeavour at calming her transports; they had succeeded, however, to a certain extent, and Mr. I—— had taken his leave, when Elizabeth, re-entering the bed-chamber in which her sister lay, in order to pay the last sad duties to her corpse, was horror-struck at seeing a crimson stream of blood running down the side of the counterpane to the floor. Her exclamation brought the girl again to her side, when it was perceived, to their astonishment, that the sanguine stream proceeded from the arm of the body, which was now manifesting signs of returning life. The half-frantic mother flew to the room, and it was with difficulty that they could prevent her, in her agitation, from so acting as to extinguish for ever the hope which had begun to rise in their bosoms. A long-drawn sigh, amounting almost to a groan, followed by several convulsive gaspings, was the prelude to the restoration of the animal functions in poor Mary: a shriek, almost preternaturally loud, considering her state of exhaustion, succeeded; but she did recover, and, with the help of restoratives, was well enough towards morning to express a strong desire that I should be sent for—a desire the more readily complied with, inasmuch as the strange expressions and declarations she had made since her restoration to consciousness, had filled her sister with the most horrible suspicions. The nature of these suspicions was such as would at any other time, perhaps, have raised a smile upon my lips; but the distress, and even agony of the poor girl, as she half hinted and half expressed them, were such as entirely to preclude every sensation at all approaching to mirth. Without endeavouring, therefore, to combat ideas, evidently too strongly impressed upon her mind at the moment to admit of present refutation, I merely used a few encouraging words, and requested her to precede me to the sick-chamber.

"The invalid was lying on the outside of the bed, partly dressed, and wearing a white dimity wrapping-gown, the colour of which corresponded but too well with the deadly paleness of her complexion. Her cheek was wan and sunken, giving an extraordinary prominence to her eye, which gleamed with a lustrous brilliancy not unfrequently characteristic of the aberration of intellect. I took her hand; it was chill and clammy, the pulse feeble and intermittent, and the general debility of her frame was such that I would fain have persuaded her to defer any conversation which, in her present state, she might not be equal to support. Her positive assurance that, until she had disburdened herself of what she called her 'dreadful secret,' she could know no rest either of mind or body, at length induced me to comply with her wish, opposition to which, in her then frame of mind, might perhaps be attended with even worse effects than its indulgence. I bowed acquiescence, and in a low and faltering voice, with frequent interruptions, occasioned by her weakness, she gave me the following singular account of the sensations which, she averred, had been experienced by her during her trance:

" 'This, sir,' she began, 'is not the first time that the cruelty of others has, for what purpose I am unable to conjecture, put me to a degree of torture which I can compare to no suffering, either of body or mind, which I have ever before experienced. On a former occasion I was willing to believe it the mere effect of a hideous dream, or what is vulgarly termed the nightmare; but this repetition, and the circumstances under which I was last *summoned*, at a time, too, when I had not even composed myself to rest, fatally convince me of the reality of what I have seen and suffered.

" 'This is no time for concealment of any kind. It is now more than a twelvemonth since I was in the habit of occasionally encountering in my walks a young man of prepossessing appearance and gentlemanly deportment. He was always alone, and generally reading; but I could not be long in doubt that these rencounters, which became every week more frequent, were not the effect of accident, or that his attention, when we did meet, was less directed to his book than to my sister and myself. He even seemed to wish to address us, and I have no doubt would have taken some other opportunity of doing so, had not one been afforded him by a strange dog attacking us one Sunday morning on our way to church, which he beat off, and made use of this little service to promote an acquaintance. His name, he said, was Francis Somers, and added that he was on a visit to a relation of the same name, resident a few miles from X——. He gave us to understand that he was himself studying surgery with the view to a medical appointment in one of the colonies. You are not to suppose, sir, that he had entered thus into his concerns at the first interview; it was not till our acquaintance had ripened, and he had visited our house more than once with my mother's sanction, that these particulars were elicited. He never disguised, from the first, that an attachment to myself was his object originally in introducing himself to our notice. As his prospects were comparatively flattering, my mother did not raise any impediments to his attentions, and I own I received them with pleasure.

" 'Days and weeks elapsed; and although the distance at which his relation resided prevented the possibility of an uninterrupted intercourse, yet neither was it so great as to preclude his frequent visits. The interval of a day, or at most of two, was all that intervened, and these temporary absences certainly did not decrease the pleasure of the meetings with which they terminated. At length a pensive expression began to exhibit itself upon his countenance, and I could not but remark that at every visit he became more abstracted and reserved. The eye of affection is not slow to detect any symptom of uneasiness in a quarter dear to it. I spoke to him, questioned him on the subject; his answer was evasive, and I said no more. My mother, too, however, had marked the same appearance of melancholy, and pressed him more strongly. He at length admitted that his spirits were depressed, and that their depression was caused by the necessity of an early, though but a temporary, separation. His uncle, and only friend, he said, had long insisted on his spending some months on the Continent, with the view of completing his professional education, and that the time was now fast approaching when it would be necessary for him to commence his journey. A look made the inquiry which my tongue refused to utter. "Yes, dearest Mary," was his reply, "I have communicated our attachment to him, partially at least; and though I dared not say that the intimation was received as I could have wished, yet I have, perhaps, on the whole, no fair reason to be dissatisfied with his reply.

" ' "The completion of my studies, and my settlement in the world, must, my uncle told me, be the first consideration; when these material points were achieved, he should not interfere with any arrangement that might be found essential to my happiness; at the same time, he has positively refused to sanction any engagement at present, which may, he says, have a tendency to divert my attention from those pursuits, on the due prosecution of which my future situation in life must depend. A compromise between love and duty was eventually wrung from me, though reluctantly; I have pledged myself to proceed immediately to my destination abroad, with a full understanding that on my return, a twelvemonth hence, no obstacle shall be thrown in the way of what are, I trust, our mutual wishes."

" 'I will not attempt to describe the feelings with which I received this communication, nor will it be necessary to say anything of what passed at the few interviews which took place before Francis quitted X——. The evening immediately previous to that of his departure he passed in this house, and, before we separated, renewed his protestations of an unchangeable affection, requiring a similar assurance from me in return. I did not hesitate to make it. "Be satisfied, my dear Francis," said I, "that no diminution in the regard I have avowed can ever take place, and though absent in body, my heart and soul will still be with you."—"Swear this," he cried with a suddenness and energy which surprised, and rather startled me: "Promise me that you will be with me *in spirit*, at least when I am far away." I gave him my hand, but that was not sufficient. "One of these dark shining ringlets, my dear Mary," said he, "as a pledge that you will not forget your vow!" I suffered him to take the scissors from my work-box and to sever a lock of my hair, which he placed in his bosom.—The next day he was pursuing his journey, and the waves were already bearing him from England.

" 'I had letters from him repeatedly during the first three months of his absence; they spoke of his health, his prospects, and of his love, but by degrees the intervals between each arrival became longer, and I fancied I perceived some falling off from that warmth of expression which had at first characterised his communications.

" 'One night I had retired to rest rather later than usual, having sat by the bedside, comparing his last brief note with some of his earlier letters, and was endeavouring to convince myself that my apprehensions of his fickleness were unfounded, when an undefinable sensation of restlessness and anxiety seized upon me. I cannot compare it to anything I had ever experienced before; my pulse fluttered, my heart beat with a quickness and violence which alarmed me, and a strange tremor shook my whole frame. I retired hastily to bed, in hopes of getting rid of so unpleasant a sensation, but in vain; a vague apprehension of I know not what occupied my mind, and vainly did I endeavour to shake it off. I can compare my feelings to nothing but those which we sometimes experience when about to undertake a long and unpleasant journey, leaving those we love behind us. More than once did I raise myself in my bed and listen, fancying that I heard myself called, and on each of those occasions the fluttering of my heart increased. Twice I was on the point of calling to my sister, who then slept in an adjoining room, but she had gone to bed indisposed, and an unwillingness to disturb either her or my mother checked me; the large clock in the room below at this moment began to strike the hour of twelve. I distinctly heard its vibrations, but ere its sounds had ceased, a burning heat, as if a hot iron had been applied to my temple, was succeeded by a dizziness—a swoon—a total loss of consciousness as to where or in what situation I was.

" 'A pain, violent, sharp, and piercing, as though my whole frame were lacerated by some keen-edged weapon, roused me from this stupor—but where was I? Everything was strange around me—a shadowy dimness rendered every object indistinct and uncertain; methought, however, that I was seated in a large, antique, high-backed chair, several of which were near, their tall black carved frames and seats interwoven with a lattice-work of cane. The apartment in which I sat was one of moderate dimensions, and from its sloping roof, seemed to be the upper story of the edifice, a fact confirmed by the moon shining, without, in full effulgence, on a huge round tower, which its light rendered plainly visible through the open casement, and the summit of which appeared but little superior in elevation to the room I occupied. Rather to the right, and in the distance, the spire of some cathedral or lofty church was visible, while sundry gable-ends, and tops of houses, told me I was in the midst of a populous but unknown city.

" 'The apartment itself had something strange in its appearance; and, in the character of its furniture and appurtenances, bore little or no resemblance to any I had ever seen before. The fireplace was large and wide, with a pair of what are sometimes called andirons, betokening that wood was the principal, if not the only fuel consumed within its recess; a fierce fire was now blazing in it, the light from which rendered visible the remotest parts of the chamber. Over a lofty old-fashioned mantelpiece, carved heavily in imitation of fruits and flowers, hung the half-length portrait of a gentleman in a dark-coloured foreign habit, with a peaked beard and moustaches, one hand resting upon a table, the other supporting a sort of *baton*, or short military staff, the summit of which was surmounted by a silver falcon. Several antique chairs, similar in appearance to those already mentioned, surrounded a massive oaken table, the length of which much exceeded its width. At the lower end of this piece of furniture stood the chair I occupied; on the upper, was placed a small chafing-dish filled with burning coals, and darting forth occasionally long flashes of various-coloured fire, the brilliance of which made itself visible, even above the strong illumination emitted from the chimney. Two huge, black, japanned cabinets, with clawed feet, reflecting from their polished surfaces the effulgence of the flame, were placed one on each side the casement-window to which I have alluded, and with a few shelves loaded with books, many of which were also strewed in disorder on the floor, completed the list of the furniture in the apartment. Some strange-looking instruments, of unknown form and purpose, lay on the table near the chafing-dish, on the other side of which a miniature portrait of myself hung, reflected by a small oval mirror in a dark-coloured frame, while a large open volume, traced with strange characters of the colour of blood, lay in front; a goblet, containing a few drops of liquid of the same ensanguined hue, was by its side.

" 'But of the objects which I have endeavoured to describe, none arrested my attention so forcibly as two others. These were the figures of two young men, in the prime of life, only separated from me by the table. They were dressed alike, each in a long flowing gown, made of some sad-coloured stuff, and confined at the waist by a crimson girdle; one of them, the shorter of the two, was occupied in feeding the embers of the chafing-dish with a resinous powder, which produced and maintained a brilliant but flickering blaze, to the action of which his companion was exposing a long lock of dark chestnut hair, that shrank and shrivelled as it approached the flame. But, O God!—that hair!—and the form of him who held it! that face! those features!—

not for one instant could I entertain a doubt—it was he! Francis!—the lock he grasped was mine, the very pledge of affection I had given him, and still, as it partially encountered the fire, a burning heat seemed to scorch the temple from which it had been taken, conveying a torturing sensation that affected my very brain.

"'How shall I proceed?—but no, it is impossible—not even to you, sir, can I—dare I—recount the proceedings of that unhallowed night of horror and of shame. Were my life extended to a term commensurate with that of the Patriarchs of old, never could its detestable, its damning pollutions be effaced from my remembrance; and oh! above all, never could I forget the diabolical glee which sparkled in the eyes of my fiendish tormentors, as they witnessed the worse than useless struggles of their miserable victim. Oh! why was it not permitted me to take refuge in unconsciousness—nay, in death itself, from the abominations of which I was compelled to be, not only a witness, but a partaker? But it is enough, sir; I will not further shock your nature by dwelling longer on the scene, the full horrors of which, words, if I even dared employ any, would be inadequate to express; suffice it to say, that after being subjected to it, how long I knew not, but certainly for more than an hour, a noise from below seemed to alarm my persecutors; a pause ensued—the lights were extinguished—and, as the sound of a footstep ascending a staircase became more distinct, my forehead felt again the excruciating sensation of heat, while the embers, kindling into a momentary flame, betrayed another portion of the ringlet consuming in the blaze. Fresh agonies succeeded, not less severe, and of a similar description to those which had seized upon me at first; oblivion again followed, and on being at length restored to consciousness, I found myself as you see me now, faint and exhausted, weakened in every limb, and every fibre quivering with agitation. My groans soon brought my sister to my aid; it was long before I could summon resolution to confide, even to her, the dreadful secret, and when I had done so, her strongest efforts were not wanting to persuade me that I had been labouring a severe attack of nightmare. I ceased to argue, but I was not convinced; the whole scene was then too present, too awfully real, to permit me to doubt the character of the transaction; and if, when a few days had elapsed, the hopelessness of imparting to others the conviction I entertained myself, produced in me an apparent acquiescence with their opinion, I have never been the less satisfied that no cause reducible to the known laws of nature occasioned my sufferings on that hellish evening. Whether that firm belief might have eventually yielded to time, whether I might at length have been brought to consider all that had passed, and the circumstances which I could never cease to remember, as a mere phantasm, the offspring of a heated imagination, acting upon an enfeebled body, I know not—last night, however, would in any case have dispelled the flattering illusion—last night—last night was the whole horrible scene acted over again. The place—the actors—the whole infernal apparatus were the same;—the same insults, the same torments, the same brutalities—all were renewed, save that the period of my agony was not so prolonged. I became sensible to an incision in my arm, though the hand that made it was not visible; at the same moment my persecutors paused; they were manifestly disconcerted, and the companion of him, whose name shall never more pass my lips, muttered something to his abettor in evident agitation; the formula of an oath of horrible import was dictated to me in terms fearfully distinct. I refused it unhesitatingly; again and again it was proposed, with menaces I tremble to think on—but I refused; the same sound was heard—interruption was evidently apprehended—the same ceremony was hastily repeated, and I again found myself released, lying on my own bed, with my mother and my sister weeping over me. O God! O God! when and how is this to end?—When will my spirit be left in peace?—Where, or with whom shall I find refuge?'

"It is impossible to convey any adequate idea of the emotions with which this unhappy girl's narrative affected me. It must not be supposed that her story was delivered in the same continuous and uninterrupted strain in which I have transcribed its substance. On the contrary, it was not without frequent intervals, of longer or shorter duration, that her account was brought to a conclusion: indeed, many passages of her strange dream were not without the greatest difficulty and reluctance communicated at all. My task was no easy one; never, in the course of a long life spent in the active duties of my Christian calling—never had I been summoned to such a conference before.

"To the half-avowed and palliated confession of committed guilt I had often listened, and pointed out the only road to secure its forgiveness. I had succeeded in cheering the spirit of despondency, and sometimes even in calming the ravings of despair; but here I had a different enemy to combat, an ineradicable prejudice to encounter, evidently backed by no common share of superstition, and confirmed by the mental weakness attendant upon severe bodily pain. To argue the sufferer out of an opinion so rooted was a hopeless attempt. I did, however, essay it; I spoke to her of the strong and mysterious connexion maintained between our waking images and those which haunt us in our dreams, and more especially during that morbid oppression commonly called nightmare. I was even enabled to adduce myself as a strong and living instance of the excess to which fancy sometimes carries her freaks on those occasions; while, by an odd coincidence, the impression made upon my own mind, which I adduced as an example, bore no slight resemblance to her own. I stated to her, that on my recovery from the fit of epilepsy, which had attacked me about two years since, just before my grandson Frederick left Oxford, it was with the greatest difficulty I could persuade myself that I had not visited him, during the interval, in his rooms at Brasenose, and even conversed with himself and his friend W——, seated in his arm-chair, and gazing through the window full upon the statue of Cain, as it stands in the centre of the quadrangle. I told her of the pain I underwent both at the commencement and termination of my attack; of the extreme lassitude that succeeded; but my efforts were all in vain: she listened to me, indeed, with an interest almost breathless, especially when I informed her of my having actually experienced the very burning sensation in the brain alluded to, no doubt a strong attendant symptom of this peculiar affection, and a proof of the identity of the complaint: but I could plainly perceive that I failed entirely in shaking the rooted opinion which possessed her, that her spirit had, by some nefarious and unhallowed means, been actually subtracted for a time from its earthly tenement."

The next extract which I shall give from my old friend's memoranda is dated August 24th, more than a week subsequent to his first visit at Mrs. Graham's. He appears, from his papers, to have visited the poor young woman more than once during the interval, and to have afforded her those spiritual consolations which no one was more capable of communicating. His patient, for so in a religious sense she may well be termed, had been sinking under the agitation she had experienced; and the constant dread she was under of similar sufferings, operated so strongly on a frame already enervated, that life at length seemed to hang only by a thread. His papers go on to say—

"I have just seen poor Mary Graham—I fear for the last time. Nature is evidently quite worn out; she is aware that she is dying, and looks forward to the termination of her existence here, not only with resignation but with joy. It is clear that her dream, or what she persists in calling her 'subtraction,' has much to do with this. For the last three days her behaviour has been altered; she has avoided conversing on the subject of her delusion, and seems to wish that I should consider her as a convert to my view of the case. This may, perhaps, be partly owing to the flippancies of her medical attendant upon the subject, for Mr. I—— has, somehow or other, got an inkling that she has been much agitated by a dream, and thinks to laugh off the impression—in my opinion injudiciously; but though a skilful, and a kindhearted, he is a young man, and of a disposition, perhaps, rather too mercurial for the chamber of a nervous invalid. Her manner has since been much more reserved to both of us: in my case, probably because she suspects me of betraying her secret."

"*August 26th.* Mary Graham is yet alive, but sinking fast; her cordiality towards me has returned since her sister confessed yesterday, that she had herself told Mr. I—— that his patient's mind 'had been affected by a terrible vision.' I am evidently restored to her confidence.—She asked me this morning, with much earnestness, 'What I believed to be the state of departed spirits during the interval between dissolution and the final day of account? And whether I thought they would be safe, in another world, from the influence of wicked persons employing an agency more than human?' Poor child! One cannot mistake the prevailing bias of her mind. Poor child!"

"*August 27th.* It is nearly over, she is sinking rapidly, but quietly and without pain. I have just administered to her the sacred elements, of which her mother partook. Elizabeth declined doing the same: she cannot, she says, yet bring herself to forgive the villain who has destroyed her sister. It is singular that she, a young woman of good plain sense in ordinary matters, should so easily adopt, and so pertinaciously retain, a superstition so puerile and ridiculous. This must be matter of a future conversation between us; at present, with the form of the dying girl before her eyes, it were vain to argue with her. The mother, I find, has written to young Somers, stating the dangerous situation of his affianced wife; indignant, as she justly is, at his long silence, it is fortunate that she has no knowledge of the suspicions entertained by her daughter. I have seen her letter; it is addressed to Mr. Francis Somers, in the Hogewoert, at Leyden, a fellow-student, then, of Frederick's. I must remember to inquire if he is acquainted with this young man."

Mary Graham, it appears, died the same night. Before her departure, she repeated to my friend the singular story she had before told him, without any material variation from the detail she had formerly given. To the last she persisted in believing that her unworthy lover had practised upon her by forbidden arts. She once more described the apartment with great minuteness, and even the person of Francis's alleged companion, who was, she said, about the middle height, hard-featured, with a rather remarkable scar upon his left cheek, extending in a transverse direction from below the eye to the nose. Several pages of my reverend friend's manuscript are filled with reflections upon this extraordinary confession, which, joined with its melancholy termination, seems to have produced no common effect upon him. He alludes to more than one subsequent discussion with the surviving sister, and piques himself on having made some progress in convincing her of the folly of her theory respecting the origin and nature of the illness itself.

His memoranda on this, and other subjects, are continued till about the middle of September, when a break ensues, occasioned, no doubt, by the unwelcome news of his grandson's dangerous state, which induces him to set out forthwith for Holland. His arrival at Leyden was, as I have already said, too late. Frederick S—— had expired after thirty hours' intense suffering, from a wound received in a duel with another student. The cause of quarrel was variously related; but, according to his landlord's version, it had originated in some silly dispute about a dream of his antagonist's, who had been the challenger. Such, at least, was the account given to him, as he said, by Frederick's friend and fellow-lodger, W——, who had acted as second on the occasion, thus acquitting himself of an obligation of the same kind due to the deceased, whose services he had put in requisition about a year before on a similar occasion, when he had himself been severely wounded in the face.

From the same authority I learned that my poor friend was much affected on finding that his arrival had been deferred too long. Every attention was shown him by the proprietor of the house, a respectable tradesman, and a chamber was prepared for his accommodation; the books, and few effects of his deceased grandson, were delivered over to him, duly inventoried, and, late as it was in the evening when he reached Leyden, he insisted on being conducted immediately to the apartments which Frederick had occupied, there to indulge the first ebullitions of his sorrows, before he retired to his own. Madame Müller accordingly led the way to an upper room, which, being situated at the top of the house, had been, from its privacy and distance from the street, selected by Frederick as his study. The Doctor entered, and taking the lamp from his conductress motioned to be left alone. His implied wish was of course complied with: and nearly two hours had elapsed before his kind-hearted hostess re-ascended, in the hope of prevailing upon him to return with her, and partake of that refreshment which he had in the first instance peremptorily declined. Her application for admission was unnoticed:—she repeated it more than once, without success; then becoming somewhat alarmed at the continued silence, opened the door and perceived her new inmate stretched on the floor in a fainting fit. Restoratives were instantly administered, and prompt medical aid succeeded at length in restoring him to consciousness. But his mind had received a shock from which, during the few weeks he survived, it never entirely recovered. His thoughts wandered perpetually: and though, from the very slight acquaintance which his hosts had with the English language, the greater part of what fell from him remained unknown, yet enough was understood to induce them to believe that something more than the mere death of his grandson had contributed thus to paralyse his faculties.

When his situation was first discovered, a small miniature was found tightly grasped in his right hand. It had been the property of Frederick, and had more than once been seen by the Müllers in his possession. To this the patient made continued reference, and would not suffer it one moment from his sight: it was in his hand when he expired. At my request it was produced to me. The portrait was that of a young woman, in an English morning dress, whose pleasing and regular features, with their mild and somewhat pensive expression, were not, I thought, altogether unknown to me. Her age was apparently about twenty. A profusion of dark chestnut was arranged in the Madonna style, above a brow of unsullied whiteness, a single ringlet depending on the left side. A glossy lock of the same colour, and evidently belonging to the original, appeared beneath a small crystal, inlaid in the back of the picture, which was plainly set in gold, and bore in a cipher the letters M. G. with the date 18—. From the inspection of this portrait, I could at the time collect nothing, nor from that of the Doctor himself, which, also, I found the next morning in Frederick's desk, accompanied by two separate portions of hair. One of them was a lock, short, and deeply tinged with grey, and had been taken, I have little doubt, from the head of my old friend himself; the other corresponded in colour and appearance with that at the back of the miniature. It was not till a few days had elapsed, and I had seen the worthy Doctor's remains quietly consigned to the narrow house, that, while arranging his papers previous to my intended return upon the morrow, I encountered the narrative I have already transcribed. The name of the unfortunate young woman connected with it forcibly arrested my attention. I recollected it immediately as one belonging to a parishioner of my own, and at once recognised the original of the female portrait as its owner.

I rose not from the perusal of his very singular statement till I had gone through the whole of it. It was late—and the rays of the single lamp by which I was reading did but very faintly illumine the remoter parts of the room in which I sat. The brilliancy of an unclouded November moon, then some twelve nights old, and shining full into the apartment, did much towards remedying the defect. My thoughts filled with the melancholy details I had read, I rose and walked to the window. The beautiful planet rose high in the firmament, and gave to the snowy roofs of the houses, and pendent icicles, all the sparkling radiance of clustering gems. The stillness of the scene harmonised well with the state of my feelings. I threw open the casement and looked abroad. Far below me, the waters of the principal canal shone like a broad mirror in the moonlight. To the left rose the Burght, a huge round tower of remarkable appearance, pierced with embrasures at its summit; while a little to the right and in the distance, the spire and pinnacles of the Cathedral of Leyden rose in all their majesty, presenting a *coup d'œil* of surpassing, though simple beauty. To a spectator of calm, unoccupied mind, the scene would have been delightful. On me it acted with an electric effect. I turned hastily to survey the apartment in which I had been sitting. It was the one designated as the study of the late Frederick S——. The sides of the room were covered with dark wainscot; the spacious fireplace opposite to me, with its polished andirons, was surmounted by a large old-fashioned mantelpiece, heavily carved in the Dutch style with fruits and flowers; above it frowned a portrait, in a Vandyke dress, with a peaked beard and moustaches; one hand of the figure rested on a table, while the other bore a marshal's staff, surmounted with a silver falcon; and—either my imagination, already heated by the scene, deceived me—or a smile as of malicious triumph curled the lip and glared in the cold leaden eye that seemed fixed upon my own. The heavy, antique, cane-backed chairs—the large oaken table—the bookshelves, the scattered volumes—all, all were there; while, to complete the picture, to my right and left, as half breathless I leaned my back against the casement, rose, on each side, a tall, dark, ebony cabinet, in whose polished sides the single lamp upon the table shone reflected as in a mirror.

What am I to think?—Can it be that the story I have been reading was written by my poor friend here, and under the influence of delirium?—Impossible! Besides they all assure me, that from the fatal night of his arrival he never left his bed—never put pen to paper. His very directions to have me summoned from England were verbally given, during one of those few and brief intervals in which reason seemed partially to resume her sway. Can it then be possible that—? W——? where is he who alone may be able to throw light on this horrible mystery? No one knows. He absconded, it seems, immediately after the duel. No trace of him exists, nor, after repeated and anxious inquiries, can I find that any student has even been known in the University of Leyden by the name of Francis Somers.

There are more things in heaven and earth
Than are dreamt of in your philosophy!!

CAPTAIN MARRYAT

(1792–1848)

FREDERICK MARRYAT, destined for the sea, had the good fortune to serve, early in his career, under Lord Cochrane on the

Impérieuse, during which commission he bore his share in several brilliant actions. Service on the Mediterranean, West Indies, North America, and St. Helena stations gave him the first-hand experience which was to prove so valuable in the composition of his books. The publication of *The Naval Officer* in 1829 was followed by the appearance of a series of naval stories, amongst the best of which are *Peter Simple* (1834) and *Mr. Midshipman Easy* (1836). Captain Marryat was a member of the Legion of Honour, held the gold medal of the Royal Humane Society for saving life at sea, and was created C.B. in 1826.

"The Story of the Greek Slave" is reprinted from *The Pacha of Many Tales* (1835).

THE STORY OF THE GREEK SLAVE

THE pacha called for coffee, and in a few minutes, accompanied, as before, by Mustapha and the armed slaves, was prowling through the city in search of a story-teller. He was again fortunate, as after a walk of half an hour, he overheard two men loudly disputing at the door of a small wine-shop, frequented by the Greeks and Franks living in the city, and into which many a slave might be observed to glide, returning with a full pitcher for the evening's amusement of his Turkish master, who, as well as his betters, clandestinely violated the precepts of the Koran.

As usual he stopped to listen, when one of the disputants exclaimed: "I tell thee, Anselmo, it is the vilest composition that was ever drunk: and I think I ought to know, after having distilled the essence of an Ethiopian, a Jew, and a Turk."

"I care nothing for your distillations, Charis," replied the other, "I consider that I am a better judge than you: I was not a monk of the Dominican order for fifteen years, without having ascertained the merit of every description of wine."

"I should like to know what that fellow means by *distilling people*," observed the pacha, "and also why a Dominican monk should know wine better than others. Mustapha, I must see those two men."

The next morning the men were in attendance, and introduced; when the pacha requested an explanation from the first who had spoken. The man threw himself down before the pacha, with his head on the floor of the divan, and said: "First promise me, your highness, by the sword of the Prophet, that no harm shall result to me from complying with your request; and then I shall obey you with pleasure."

"Mashallah! what is the Kafir afraid of? What crimes hath he committed, that he would have his pardon granted before he tells his story?" said the pacha to Mustapha.

"No crime toward your state, your sublime highness; but when in another country, I was unfortunate," continued the man. "I cannot tell my story, unless your highness will condescend to give your promise."

"May it please your highness," observed Mustapha, "he asserts his crime to have been committed in another state. It may be heavy, and I suspect 'tis murder; but although we watch the flowers which ornament our gardens, and would punish those who cull them, yet we care not who intrudes and robs our neighbour—and thus, it appears to me, your highness, that it is with states, and sufficient for the ruler of each to watch over the lives of his own subjects."

"Very true, Mustapha," rejoined the pacha; "besides, we might lose the story. Kafir, you have our promise, and may proceed."

The Greek slave (for such he was) then rose up, and narrated his story in the following words.

I am a Greek by birth; my parents were poor people residing at Smyrna. I was an only son, and brought up to my father's profession, that of a cooper. When I was twenty years old, I had buried both my parents, and was left to shift for myself. I had been for some time in the employ of a Jewish wine-merchant, and I continued there for three years after my father's death, when a circumstance occurred which led to my subsequent prosperity and present degradation.

At the time that I am speaking of, I had, by strict diligence and sobriety, so pleased my employer, that I had risen to be his foreman; and although I still superintended and occasionally worked at the cooperage, I was entrusted with the drawing off and fining of the wines, to prepare them for market. There was an Ethiopian slave, who worked under my orders, a powerful, broad-shouldered, and most malignant wretch, whom my master found it almost impossible to manage; the bastinado, or any other punishment, he derided, and after the application only became more sullen and discontented than before. The fire that flashed from his eyes, upon any fault being found by me on account of his negligence, was so threatening, that I every day expected I should be murdered. I repeatedly requested my master to part with him; but the Ethiopian being a very powerful man, and able, when he chose, to move a pipe of wine without assistance, the avarice of the Jew would not permit him to accede to my repeated solicitations.

One morning I entered the cooperage, and found the Ethiopian fast asleep by the side of a cask which I had been wanting for some time, and expected to have found ready. Afraid to punish him myself, I brought my master to witness his conduct. The Jew, enraged at his idleness, struck him on the head with one of the staves. The Ethiopian sprung up in a rage, but on seeing his master with the stave in his hand, contented himself with muttering, "That he would not remain to be beaten in that manner," and reapplied himself to his labour. As soon as my master had left the cooperage, the Ethiopian vented his anger upon me for having informed against him, and seizing the stave, flew at me with the intention of beating out my brains. I stepped behind the cask; he followed me, and just as I had seized an adze to defend myself, he fell over the stool which lay in his way; he was springing up to renew the attack, when I struck him a blow with the adze which entered his skull and laid him dead at my feet.

I was very much alarmed at what had occurred; for although I felt justified in self-defence, I was aware that my master would be very much annoyed at the loss of the slave, and as there were no witnesses, it would go hard with me when brought before the cadi. After some reflection I determined, as the slave had said, "he would not remain to be beaten," that I would leave my master to suppose he had run away, and in the meantime conceal the body. But to effect this was difficult, as I could not take it out of the cooperage without being perceived. After some cogitation, I decided upon putting it into the cask, and heading it up. It required all my strength to lift the body in, but at last I succeeded. Having put in the head of the pipe, I hammered down the hoops and rolled it into the store, where I had been waiting to fill it with wine for the next year's demand. As soon as it was in its place, I pumped off the wine from the vat, and having filled up the cask and put in the bung, I felt as if a heavy load had been removed from my mind, as there was no chance of immediate discovery.

I had but just completed my task, and was sitting down on one of the settles, when my master came in, and inquired for the slave. I replied that he had left the cooperage, swearing that he would work no more. Afraid of losing him, the Jew hastened to give notice to the authorities that he might be apprehended; but after some time, as nothing could be heard of the supposed runaway, it was imagined that he had drowned himself in a fit of sullenness, and no more was thought about him. In the meantime I continued to work there as before, and as I had the charge of everything I had no doubt but that, some day or another, I should find means of quietly disposing of my incumbrance.

The next spring, I was busy pumping off from one cask into the other, according to our custom, when the aga of the janissaries came in. He was a great wine-bibber, and one of our best customers. As his dependents were all well known, it was not his custom to send them for wine, but to come himself to the store and select a pipe. This was carried away in a litter by eight strong slaves, with the curtains drawn close, as if it had been a new purchase which he had added to his harem. My master showed him the pipes of wine prepared for that year's market, which were arranged in two rows;

and I hardly need observe that the one containing the Ethiopian was not in the foremost. After tasting one or two which did not seem to please him, the aga observed, "Friend Issachar, thy tribe will always put off the worst goods first, if possible. Now I have an idea that there is better wine in the second tier, than in the one thou hast recommended. Let thy Greek put a spile into that cask," continued he, pointing to the very one in which I had headed up the black slave. As I made sure that as soon as he had tasted the contents he would spit them out, I did not hesitate to bore the cask and draw off the wine, which I handed to him. He tasted it and held it to the light—tasted it again and smacked his lips—then turning to my master, exclaimed, "Thou dog of a Jew! wouldst thou have palmed off upon me vile trash, when thou hadst in thy possession wine which might be sipped with the Houris in Paradise?"

The Jew appealed to me if the pipes of wine were not all of the same quality; and I confirmed his assertion.

"Taste it then," replied the aga, "and then taste the first which you recommended to me."

My master did so, and was evidently astonished. "It certainly has more body," replied he; "yet how that can be, I know not. Taste it, Charis." I held the glass to my lips, but nothing could induce me to taste the contents. I contented myself with agreeing with my master (as I conscientiously could), "that it certainly had more *body* in it than the rest."

The aga was so pleased with the wine, that he tasted two or three more pipes of the back tier, hoping to find others of the same quality, probably intending to have laid in a large stock; but finding no other of the same flavour, he ordered his slaves to roll the one containing the body of the slave into the litter, and carry it to his own house.

"Stop a moment, thou lying Kafir!" said the pacha, "dost thou really mean to say that the wine was better than the rest?"

"Why should I tell a lie to your sublime highness? am not I a worm that you may crush? As I informed you, I did not taste it, your highness; but after the aga had departed, my master expressed his surprise at the excellence of the wine, which he affirmed to be superior to anything that he had ever tasted—and his sorrow that the aga had taken away the cask, which prevented him from ascertaining the cause. But one day I was narrating the circumstance to a Frank in this country, who expressed no surprise at the wine being improved. He had been a wine-merchant in England, and he informed me that it was the custom there to throw large pieces of raw beef into the wine to feed it; and that some particular wines were very much improved thereby."

"Allah Kebur! God is great!" cried the pacha. "Then it must be so—I have heard that the English are very fond of beef. Now go on with thy story."

Your highness cannot imagine the alarm which I felt when the cask was taken away by the aga's slaves. I gave myself up for a lost man, and resolved upon immediate flight from Smyrna. I calculated the time that it would take for the aga to drink the wine, and made my arrangements accordingly. I told my master that it was my intention to leave him, as I had an offer to go into business with a relation at Zante. My master, who could not well do without me, entreated me to stay; but I was positive. He then offered me a share of the business if I would remain, but I was not to be persuaded. Every rap at the door, I thought that the aga and his janissaries were coming for me; and I hastened my departure, which was fixed for the following day—when in the evening my master came into the store with a paper in his hand.

"Charis," said he, "perhaps you have supposed that I only offered to make you a partner in my business to induce you to remain, and then to deceive you. To prove the contrary, here is a deed drawn up by which you are a partner, and entitled to one-third of the future profits. Look at it, you will find that it has been executed in due form before the cadi."

He had put the paper into my hand, and I was about to return it with a refusal, when a loud knocking at the door startled us both. It was a party of janissaries dispatched by the aga, to bring us to him immediately. I knew well enough what it must be about, and I cursed my folly in having delayed so long; but the fact was, the wine proved so agreeable to the aga's palate that he had drunk it much faster than usual; besides which, the body of the slave took up at least a third of the cask, and diminished the contents in the same proportion. There was no appeal, and no escape. My master, who was ignorant of the cause, did not seem at all alarmed, but willingly accompanied the soldiers. I, on the contrary, was nearly dead from fear.

When we arrived, the aga burst out in the most violent exclamations against my master. "Thou rascal of a Jew!" said he, "dost thou think that thou art to impose upon a true believer, and sell him a pipe of wine which is not more than two-thirds full—filling it up with trash of some sort or another. Tell me what it is that is so heavy in the cask now that it is empty?"

The Jew protested his ignorance, and appealed to me: I, of course, pretended the same. "Well, then," replied the aga, "we will soon see. Let thy Greek send for his tools, and the cask shall be opened in our presence; then perhaps thou wilt recognize thine own knavery."

Two of the janissaries were dispatched for the tools, and when they arrived I was directed to take the head out of the cask. I now considered my death as certain—nothing buoyed me up but my observing that the resentment of the aga was levelled more against my master than against me; but still I thought that, when the cask was opened, the recognition of the black slave must immediately take place, and the evidence of my master would fix the murder upon me.

It was with a trembling hand that I obeyed the orders of the aga—the head of the pipe was taken out, and, to the horror of all present, the body was exposed; but instead of being black, it had turned *white*, from the time which it had been immersed. I rallied a little at this circumstance, as, so far, suspicion would be removed.

"Holy Abraham!" exclaimed my master, "what is that which I see!—A dead body, so help me God!—but I know nothing about it—do you, Charis?" I vowed that I did not, and called the Patriarch to witness the truth of my assertion. But while we were thus exclaiming, the aga's eyes were fixed upon my master with an indignant and deadly stare which spoke volumes; while the remainder of the people who were present, although they said nothing, seemed as if they were ready to tear him into pieces.

"Cursed unbeliever!" at last uttered the Turk, "is it thus that thou preparest the wine for the disciples of the Prophet?"

"Holy father Abraham!—I know no more than you do, aga, how that body came there; but I will change the cask with pleasure, and will send you another."

"Be it so," replied the aga; "my slave shall fetch it now." He gave directions accordingly, and the litter soon reappeared with another pipe of wine.

"It will be a heavy loss to a poor Jew—one pipe of good wine," observed my master, as it was rolled out of the litter; and he took up his hat with the intention to depart.

"Stay," cried the aga, "I do not mean to rob you of your wine."

"Oh, then, you will pay me for it?" replied my master; "aga, you are a considerate man."

"Thou shalt see," retorted the aga, who gave directions to his slaves to draw off the wine in vessels. As soon as the pipe was empty, he desired me to take the head out; and when I had obeyed him, he ordered his janissaries to put my master in. In a minute he was gagged and bound, and tossed into the pipe; and I was directed to put in the head as before. I was very unwilling to comply; for I had no reason to complain of my master, and knew that he was punished for the fault of which I had been guilty. But it was a case of life or death—and the days of self-devotion have long passed away in our country. Besides which, I had the deed in my pocket by which I was a partner in the business, and my master had no heirs—so that I stood a chance to come into the whole of his property. Moreover——

"Never mind your reasons," observed the pacha, "you headed him up in the cask—go on."

"I did so, your highness; but although I dared not disobey, I assure you that it was with a sorrowful heart—the more so, as I did not know the fate which might be reserved for myself."

As soon as the head was in, and the hoops driven on, the aga desired his slaves to fill the cask up again with the wine; and thus did my poor master perish.

"Put in the bung, Greek," said the aga, in a stern voice.

I did so, and stood trembling before him.

"Well! what knowest thou of this transaction?"

I thought, as the aga had taken away the life of my master, that it would not hurt him if I took away a little from his character. I answered that I really knew nothing, but that, the other day, a black slave had disappeared in a very suspicious manner—that my master made very little inquiry after him—and I now strongly suspected that he must have suffered the same fate. I added, that my master had expressed himself very sorry that his highness had taken away the pipe of wine, as he would have reserved it.

"Cursed Jew!" replied the aga; "I don't doubt but he has murdered a dozen in the same manner."

"I am afraid so, sir," replied I, "and suspect that I was to have been his next victim; for when I talked of going away, he persuaded me to stay, and gave me this paper, by which I was to become his partner with one-third of the profits. I presume that I should not have enjoyed them long."

"Well, Greek," observed the aga, "this is fortunate for you; as, upon certain conditions, you may enter upon the whole property. One is, that you keep this pipe of wine with the rascally Jew in it, that I may have the pleasure occasionally to look at my revenge. You will also keep the pipe with the other body in it, that it may keep my anger alive. The last is, that you will supply me with what wine I may require, of the very best quality, without making any charge. Do you consent to these terms, or am I to consider you as a party to this infamous transaction?"

I hardly need observe that the terms were gladly accepted. Your highness must be aware that nobody thinks much about a Jew. When I was questioned as to his disappearance, I shrugged up my shoulders and told the inquirers, confidentially, that the aga of the janissaries had put him *in prison*, and that I was carrying on the business until his release.

In compliance with the wishes of the aga, the two casks containing the Jew and the Ethiopian slave were placed together on settles higher than the rest, in the centre of the store. He would come in the evening, and rail at the cask containing my late master for hours at a time; during which he drank so much wine, that it was a very common circumstance for him to remain in the house until the next morning.

You must not suppose, your highness, that I neglected to avail myself (unknown to the aga) of the peculiar properties of the wine which those casks contained. I had them spiled underneath, and, constantly running off the wine from them, filled them up afresh. In a short time there was not a gallon in my possession which had not a *dash* in it of either the Ethiopian or the Jew; and my wine was so improved, that it had a most rapid sale, and I became rich.

All went on prosperously for three years; when the aga, who during that time had been my constant guest, and at least three times a week had been intoxicated in my house, was ordered with his troops to join the Sultan's army. By keeping company with him, I had insensibly imbibed a taste for wine, although I never had been inebriated. The day that his troops marched, he stopped at my door, and dismounting from his Arabian, came in to take a farewell glass, desiring his men to go on, and that he would ride after them. One glass brought on another, and the time flew rapidly away. The evening closed in, and the aga was, as usual, in a state of intoxication; he insisted upon going down to the store, to rail once more at the cask containing the body of the Jew. We had long been on the most friendly terms, and having this night drunk more than usual, I was incautious enough to say: "Prithee, aga, do not abuse my poor master any more, for he has been the making of my fortune. I will tell you a secret now that you are going away—there is not a drop of wine in my store that has not been flavoured either by him, or by the slave in the other cask. That is the reason why it is so much better than other people's."

"How!" exclaimed the aga, who was now almost incapable of speech. "Very well, rascal Greek! die you shall like your master. Holy Prophet! what a state for a Mussulman to go to Paradise in—impregnated with the essence of a cursed Jew!—Wretch! you shall die—you shall die."

He made a grasp at me, and missing his foot, fell on the ground in such a state of drunkenness as not to be able to get up again. I knew that when he became sober, he would not forget what had taken place, and that I should be sacrificed to his vengeance. The fear of death, and the wine which I had drunk, decided me how to act. I dragged him into an empty pipe, put the head in, hooped it up, and rolling it into the tier, filled it with wine.

Thus did I revenge my poor master, and relieved myself from any further molestation on the part of the aga.

"What!" cried the pacha, in a rage, "you drowned a true believer—an aga of janissaries! Thou dog of a Kafir—thou son of Shitan—and dare avow it! Call in the executioner."

"Mercy! your sublime highness, mercy!" cried the Greek. "Have I not your promise by the sword of the Prophet? Besides, he was no true believer, or he would not have disobeyed the law. A good Mussulman will never touch a drop of wine."

"I promised to forgive, and did forgive, the murder of the black slave; but an aga of janissaries!—Is not that quite another thing?" appealed the pacha to Mustapha.

"Your highness is just in your indignation—the Kafir deserves to be impaled. Yet there are two considerations which your slave ventures to submit to your sublime wisdom. The first is, that your highness gave an unconditional promise, and swore by the sword of the Prophet."

"Staffir Allah! what care I for that! Had I sworn to be a true believer, it were something."

"The other is, that the slave has not yet finished his story, which appears to be interesting."

"Wallah! that is true. Let him finish his story."

But the Greek slave remained with his face on the ground; and it was not until a renewal of the promise, sworn upon the holy standard made out of the nether garments of the Prophet, by the pacha, who had recovered his temper, and was anxious for the conclusion of the story, that he could be induced to proceed, which he did as follows:

As soon as I had bunged up the cask, I went down to the yard where the aga had left his horse, and having severely wounded the poor beast with his sword, I let it loose, that it might gallop home. The noise of the horse's hoofs in the middle of the night aroused his family, and when they discovered that it was wounded and without its rider, they imagined that the aga had been attacked and murdered by the banditti when he had followed his troops. They sent to me, to ask at what time he had left my house; I replied, an hour after dark—that he was very much intoxicated at the time—and had left his sabre, which I returned. They had no suspicions of the real facts, and it was believed that he had perished on the road.

I was now rid of my dangerous acquaintance, and although he certainly had drunk a great quantity of my wine, yet I recovered the value of it with interest, from the flavour which I obtained from his body, and which I imparted to the rest of my stock. I raised him up alongside of the two other casks; and my trade was more profitable and my wines in greater repute than ever.

But one day the cadi, who had heard my wine extolled, came privately to my house; I bowed to the ground at the honour conferred, for I had long wished to have him as a customer. I drew some of my best. "This, honourable sir," said I, presenting the glass, "is what I call my aga wine: the late aga was so fond of it, he used to order a whole cask at once to his house, and had it taken there in a litter."

"A good plan," replied the cadi, "much better than sending a slave with a pitcher, which gives occasion for remarks: I will do the same; but, first, let me taste all you have."

He tasted several casks, but none pleased him so much as the first which I had recommended. At last he cast his eyes upon the three casks raised above the others.

"And what are those?" inquired he.

"Empty casks, sir," replied I; but he had his stick in his hand, and he struck one.

"Greek, thou tellest me these casks are empty, but they do not sound so; I suspect that thou hast better wine than I have tasted: draw me off from these immediately."

I was obliged to comply—he tasted them—vowed that the wine was exquisite, and that he would purchase the whole. I stated to him that the wine in those casks was used for flavouring the rest; and that the price was enormous, hoping that he would not pay it. He inquired how much—I asked him four times the price of the other wines.

"Agreed," said the cadi; "it is dear—but one cannot have good wine without paying for it: it is a bargain."

I was very much alarmed; and stated that I could not part with those casks, as I should not be able to carry on my business with reputation, if I lost the means of flavouring my wines, but all in vain; he said that I had asked a price and he had agreed to give it. Ordering his slaves to bring a litter, he would not leave the store until the whole of the casks were carried away, and thus did I lose my Ethiopian, my Jew, and my aga.

As I knew that the secret would soon be discovered, the very next day I prepared for my departure. I received my money from the cadi, to whom I stated my intention to leave, as he had obliged me to sell him those wines, and I had no longer hopes of carrying on my business with success. I again begged him to allow me to have them back, offering him three pipes of wine as a present if he would consent, but it was of no use. I chartered a vessel, which I loaded with the rest of my stock; and, taking all my money with me, made sail for Corfu, before any discovery had taken place. But we encountered a heavy gale of wind, which, after a fortnight (during which we attempted in vain to make head against it), forced us back to Smyrna. When the weather moderated, I directed the captain to take the vessel into the outer roadstead that I might sail as soon as possible. We had not dropped anchor again more than five minutes when I perceived a boat pulling off from the shore in which was the cadi and the officers of justice.

Convinced that I was discovered, I was at a loss how to proceed, when the idea occurred to me that I might conceal my own body in a cask, as I had before so well concealed those of others.

I called the captain down into the cabin, and telling him that I had reason to suspect that the cadi would take my life, offered him a large part of the cargo if he would assist me.

The captain who, unfortunately for me, was a Greek, consented. We went down into the hold, started the wine out of one of the pipes, and having taken out the head, I crawled in, and was hooped up.

The cadi came on board immediately afterwards and inquired for me. The captain stated that I had fallen overboard in the gale, and that he had in consequence returned, the vessel not being consigned to any house at Corfu.

"Has then the accursed villain escaped my vengeance!" exclaimed the cadi; "the murderer that fines his wines with the bodies of his fellow-creatures: but you may deceive me, Greek, we will examine the vessel."

The officers who accompanied the cadi proceeded carefully to search every part of the ship. Not being able to discover me, the Greek captain was believed; and, after a thousand imprecations upon my soul, the cadi and his people departed.

I now breathed more freely, notwithstanding I was nearly intoxicated with the lees of the wine which impregnated the wood of the cask, and I was anxious to be set at liberty; but the treacherous captain had no such intention, and never came near me. At night he cut his cable and made sail, and I overheard a conversation between two of the men, which made known to me his intentions: these were to throw me overboard on his passage, and take possession of my property. I cried out to them from the bung-hole: I screamed for mercy, but in vain. One of them answered, that, as I had murdered others, and put them into casks, I should now be treated in the same manner.

I could not but mentally acknowledge the justice of my punishment, and resigned myself to my fate; all that I wished was to be thrown over at once and released from my misery. The momentary anticipation of death appeared to be so much worse than the reality. But it was ordered otherwise: a gale of wind blew up with such force, that the captain and crew had enough to do to look after the vessel, and either I was forgotten or my doom was postponed until a more seasonable opportunity.

On the third day I heard the sailors observe that, with such a wretch as I was remaining on board, the vessel must inevitably be lost. The hatches were then opened: I was hoisted up and cast into the raging sea. The bung of the cask was out, but by stuffing my handkerchief in when the hole was under water, I prevented the cask from filling; and when it was uppermost, I removed it for a moment to obtain fresh air. I was dreadfully bruised by the constant rolling, in a heavy sea, and completely worn out with fatigue and pain; I had made up my mind to let the water in and be rid of my life, when I was tossed over and over with such dreadful rapidity as prevented my taking the precaution of keeping out the water. After three successive rolls of the same kind, I found that the cask, which had been in the surf, had struck on the beach. In a moment after, I heard voices, and people came up to the cask and rolled me along. I would not speak, lest they should be frightened, and allow me to remain on the beach, where I might again be tossed about by the waves; but as soon as they stopped, I called in a faint voice from the bung-hole, begging them for mercy's sake to let me out.

At first they appeared alarmed; but, on my repeating my request, and stating that I was the owner of the ship which was off the land, and the captain and crew had mutinied and tossed me overboard, they brought some tools and set me at liberty.

The first sight that met my eyes after I was released was my vessel lying a wreck, each wave that hurled her further on the beach breaking her more and more to pieces. She was already divided amidships, and the white foaming surf was covered with pipes of wine, which, as fast as they were cast on shore, were rolled up by the same people who had released me. I was so worn out, that I fainted where I lay. When I came to, I found myself in a cave upon a bundle of capotes, and perceived a party or forty or fifty men, who were sitting by a large fire, and emptying with great rapidity one of my pipes of wine.

As soon as they observed that I was coming to my senses, they poured some wine down my throat, which restored me. I was then desired by one of them, who seemed to be the chief, to approach.

"The men who have been saved from the wreck," said he, "have told me strange stories of your enormous crimes—now, sit down, and tell me the truth—if I believe you, you shall have justice—I am cadi here—if you wish to know where you are, it is upon the island of Ischia—if you wish to know in what company, it is in the society of those who by illiberal people are called pirates: now tell the truth."

I thought that with pirates my story would be received better than with other people, and I therefore narrated my history to them, in the same words that I now have to your highness. When I had finished, the captain of the gang observed:

"Well, then, as you acknowledge to have killed a slave, to have assisted at the death of a Jew, and to have drowned an aga, you certainly deserve death; but, on consideration of the excellence of the wine, and the secret which you have imparted to us, I shall commute your sentence. As for the captain and the remainder of the crew, they have been guilty of treachery and piracy on the high seas—a most heinous offence, which deserves instant death: but, as it is by their means that we have been put in possession of the wine, I shall be lenient. I therefore sentence you all to hard labour for life. You shall be sold as slaves in Cairo, and we will pocket the money and drink your wine."

The pirates loudly applauded the justice of a decision by which they benefited, and all appeal on our parts was useless. When the weather became more settled, we were put on board one of their small xebeques, and on our arrival at this port were exposed for sale and purchased.

Such, pacha, is the history which induced me to make use of the expression which you wished to be explained; and I hope you will allow that I have been more unfortunate than guilty, as on every occasion in which I took away the life of another, I had only to choose between that and my own.

"Well, it is rather a curious story," observed the pacha, "but still, if it were not for my promise, I certainly would have your head off for drowning the aga—I consider it excessively impertinent in an unbelieving Greek to suppose that his life is of the same value as that of an aga of janissaries, and follower of the Prophet; but, however, my promise was given, and you may depart."

"The wisdom of your highness is brighter than the stars of the heaven," observed Mustapha. "Shall the slave be honoured with your bounty?"

"Mashallah! bounty! I've given him his life, and, as he considers it of more value than an aga's, I think 'tis a very handsome present. Drown an aga, indeed!" continued the pacha, rising. "But it certainly was a very curious story. Let it be written down, Mustapha. We'll hear the other man to-morrow."

WILLIAM MAGINN

(1793–1842)

WILLIAM MAGINN, who graduated at Trinity College, Dublin, in 1811, was a fine classical scholar, and one of his earliest excursions into literature was the contribution to *Blackwood's Magazine* of a rendering of "Chevy Chase" in doggerel Latin verse. He also had a hand in *Noctes Ambrosianæ*. He helped to found *Fraser's Magazine* and contributed largely to it. His *Homeric Ballads* (1838) attracted much attention, and his essays on the *Learning of Shakespeare* were much appreciated. His *O'Doherty's Maxims* are a delicious parody of La Rochefoucauld; but he is best remembered for his *Gallery of Literary Characters*, which was illustrated by Daniel Maclise.

"Bob Burke's Duel with Ensign Brady of the 48th" is reprinted from *Miscellanies*.

BOB BURKE'S DUEL WITH ENSIGN BRADY OF THE 48TH

CHAPTER I

HOW BOB WAS IN LOVE WITH MISS THEODOSIA MACNAMARA

"WHEN the 48th were quartered in Mallow I was there on a visit to one of the Purcells who abound in that part of the world, and, being some sixteen or seventeen years younger than I am now, thought I might as well fall in love with Miss Theodosia Macnamara. She was a fine grown girl, full of flesh and blood, rose five foot nine at least when shod, had many excellent points, and stepped out slappingly upon her pasterns. She was somewhat of a roarer, it must be admitted, for you could hear her from one end of the Walk to the other; and I am told that, as she has grown somewhat aged, she shows symptoms of vice; but I knew nothing of the latter, and did not mind the former, because I never had a fancy for your nimini-pimini young ladies, with their mouths squeezed into the shape and dimensions of a needle's eye. I always suspect such damsels as having a very portentous design against mankind in general.

"She was at Mallow for the sake of the Spa, it being understood that she was consumptive, though I'll answer for it her lungs were not touched; and I never saw any signs of consumption about her, except at mealtimes, when her consumption was undoubtedly great. However, her mother, a very nice middle-aged woman—she was of the O'Regans of the West, and a perfect lady in her manners, with a very remarkable red nose, which she attributed to a cold which had settled in that part, and which cold she was always endeavouring to cure with various balsamic preparations taken inwardly—maintained that her poor chicken, as she called her, was very delicate, and required the air and water of Mallow to cure her. Theodosia (she was so named after some of the Limerick family) or, as we generally called her, Dosy, was rather of a sanguine complexion, with hair that might be styled auburn, but which usually received another name. Her nose was turned up, as they say was that of Cleopatra; and her mouth, which was never idle, being always employed in eating, drinking, shouting, or laughing, was of considerable dimensions. Her eyes were piercers, with a slight tendency to a cast; and her complexion was equal to a footman's plush breeches, or the first tinge of the bloom of morning bursting through a summer cloud, or what else verse-making men are fond of saying. I remember a young man who was in love with her writing a song about her, in which there was one or other of the similes above mentioned, I forget which. The verses were said to be very clever, as no doubt they were; but I do not recollect them, never being able to remember poetry. Dosy's mother used to say it was a hectic flush. If so, it was a very permanent flush, for it never left her cheeks for a moment, and, had it not belonged to a young lady in a galloping consumption, would have done honour to a dairy-maid.

"Pardon these details, gentlemen," said Bob Burke, sighing; "but one always thinks of the first loves. Tom Moore says that 'there's nothing half so sweet in life as young love's dram'; and talking of that, if there's anything left in the brandy bottle, hand it over to me. Here's to the days gone by! They will never come again. Dear Dosy, you and I had some fun together. I see her now with her red hair escaping from under her hat, in a pea-green habit, a stiff cutting whip in her hand, licking it into Tom the Devil, a black horse that would have carried a sixteen-stoner over a six-foot wall, following Will Wrixon's hounds at the rate of fifteen miles an hour, and singing out, 'Go it, my trumps!' These are the recollections that bring tears in a man's eyes."

There were none visible in Bob's; but, as he here finished his dram, it is perhaps a convenient opportunity for concluding a chapter.

CHAPTER II

HOW ENSIGN BRADY WENT TO DRINK TEA WITH MISS THEODOSIA MACNAMARA

"THE day of that hunt was the very day that led to my duel with Brady. He was a long, straddling, waddle-mouthed chap, who had no more notion of riding a hunt than a rhinoceros. He was mounted on a showy-enough-looking mare, which had been nerved by Rodolphus Bootiman, the horse-doctor, and though 'a good un to look at, was a rum un to go'; and before she was nerved, all the work had been taken out of her by long Lanty Philpot, who sold her to Brady after dinner for fifty pounds, she not being worth twenty in her best day, and Brady giving his bill at three months for the fifty. My friend the ensign was no judge of a horse, and the event showed that my cousin Lanty was no judge of a bill, not a cross of the fifty being paid from that day to this, and it is out of the question now, it being long past the statute of limitations, to say nothing of Brady having since twice taken the benefit of the Act. So both parties jockeyed one another, having that pleasure, which must do them instead of profit.

"She was a bay chestnut, and nothing would do Brady but he must run her at a little gap which Miss Dosy was going to clear, in order to show his gallantry and agility; and certainly I must do him the credit to say that he did get his mare *on* the gap, which was no small feat; but there she broke down, and off went Brady, neck and crop, into as fine a pool of stagnant green mud as you would ever wish to see. He was ducked regularly in it, and he came out, if not in the jacket, yet in the colours of the Rifle Brigade, looking rueful enough at his misfortune, as you may suppose. But he had not much time to think of the figure he cut, for before he could well get up who should come right slap over him but Miss Dosy herself upon Tom the Devil, having cleared the gap and a yard beyond the pool in fine style. Brady ducked, and escaped the horse, a little fresh daubing being of less consequence than the knocking out of his brains, if he had any; but he did not escape a smart rap from a stone which one of Tom's heels flung back with such unlucky accuracy as to hit Brady right in the mouth, knocking out one of his eyeteeth (which I do not recollect). Brady clapped his hand to his mouth, and bawled, as any man might do in such a case, so loud that Miss Dosy checked Tom for a minute to turn round, and there she saw him making the most horrid faces in the world, his mouth streaming with blood, and himself painted green from head to foot, with as pretty a coat of shining slime as was to be found in the province of Munster. 'That's the gentleman you just leapt over, Miss Dosy,' said I, for I had joined her; 'and he seems to be in some confusion.' 'I am sorry,' said she, 'Bob, that I should have in any way offended him or any other gentleman by leaping over him, but I can't wait now. Take him my compliments, and tell him I should be happy to see him at tea at six o'clock this evening, in a different suit.' Off she went, and I rode back with her message (by which means I was thrown out), and (would you believe it?) he had the ill manners to say 'the h—'; but I shall not repeat what he said. It was impolite to the last degree, not to say profane: but perhaps he may be somewhat excused under his peculiar circumstances. There is no knowing what even Job himself might have said immediately after being thrown off his horse into a green pool, with his eyetooth knocked out, his mouth full of mud and blood, on being asked to a tea-party.

"He—Brady, not Job—went, nevertheless; for on our return to Miss Dosy's lodging we found a triangular note, beautifully perfumed, expressing his gratitude for her kind invitation, and telling her not to think of the slight accident which had occurred. How it happened, he added, he could not conceive, his mare never having broken down with him before—which was true enough, as that was the first day he ever mounted her—and she having been bought by himself at a sale of the Earl of Darlington's horses last year, for two hundred guineas. She was a great favourite, he went on to say, with the Earl, who often rode her, and ran at Doncaster by the name of Miss Russell. All this latter part of the note was not quite so true, but then it must be admitted that when we talk about horses we are not tied down to be exact to a letter. If we were, God help Tattersall's!

"To tea, accordingly, the ensign came at six, wiped clean, and in a different set-out altogether from what he appeared in on emerging from the ditch. He was, to make use of a phrase introduced from the ancient Latin into the modern Greek, togged up in the most approved style of his Majesty's 48th Foot. Bright was the scarlet of his coat; deep the blue of his facings."

"I beg your pardon," said Anthony Harrison, here interrupting the speaker. "The 48th are not royals, and you ought to know that no regiment but those which are royal sport blue facings. I remember once upon a time, in a coffee-shop, detecting a very smart fellow who wrote some clever things in a magazine published in Edinburgh by one Blackwood, under the character of a military man, not to be anything of the kind, by his talking about ensigns in the Fusileers—all the world knowing that in the Fusileers there are no ensigns, but in their place second lieutenants. Let me set you right there, Bob. The facings your friend Brady exhibited to the wondering gaze of the Mallow tea-table must have been buff—pale buff."

"Buff, black, blue, brown, yellow, Pompadour, brick-dust, no matter what they were," continued Burke, in no wise pleased by the interruption; "they were as bright as they could be made, and so was all the lace, and other traps which I shall not specify more minutely, as I am in the presence of so sharp a critic. He was, in fact, in full dress—as you know is done in country quarters—and, being not a bad plan and elevation of a man, looked well enough. Miss Dosy, I perceived, had not been perfectly ignorant of the rank and condition of the gentleman over whom she had leapt, for she was dressed in her purple satin body and white skirt, which she always put on when she wished to be irresistible, and her hair was suffered to flow in long ringlets down her fair neck—and, by Jupiter, it was fair as a swan's, and as majestic too—and no mistake. Yes! Dosy Macnamara looked divine that evening.

"Never mind! Tea was brought in by Mary Keefe, and it was just as all other teas have been and will be. Do not, however, confound it with the wafer-sliced and hot-watered abominations which are inflicted, perhaps justly, on the wretched individuals who are guilty of haunting *soirées* and *conversaziones* in this good and bad city of London. The tea was congou or souchong, or some other of these Chinese affairs, for anything I know to the contrary; for, having dined at the house, I was mixing my fifth tumbler when tea was brought in, and Mrs. Macnamara begged me not to disturb myself, and, she being a lady for whom I had a great respect, I complied with her desire; but there was a potato-cake, an inch thick and two feet in diameter, which Mrs. Macnamara informed me in a whisper was made by Dosy after the hunt.

" 'Poor chicken,' she said, 'if she had the strength, she has the willingness; but she is so delicate. If you saw her handling the potatoes to-day.'

" 'Madam,' said I, looking tender, and putting my hand on my heart, 'I wish I was a potato!'

CHAPTER III

HOW ENSIGN BRADY ASTONISHED THE NATIVES AT MISS THEODOSIA MACNAMARA'S

"I THOUGHT this was an uncommonly pathetic wish, after the manner of the Persian poet Hafiz; but it was scarcely out of my mouth when Ensign Brady, taking a cup of tea from Miss Dosy's hand, looking upon me with an air of infinite condescension, declared that I must be the happiest of men, as my wish was granted before it was made. I was preparing to answer, but Miss Dosy laughed so loud that I had not time, and my only resource was to swallow what I had just made. The ensign followed up his victory without mercy.

" 'Talking of potatoes, Miss Theodosia,' said he, looking at me, 'puts me in mind of truffles. Do you know this most exquisite cake of yours much resembles a *gâteau aux truffes?* By Gad! how Colonel Thornton, Sir Harry Millicent, Lord Mortgageshire, and that desperate fellow, the Honourable and Reverend Dick Sellenger, and I used to tuck in truffles when we were quartered in Paris. Mortgageshire—an uncommon droll fellow; I used to call his lordship Morty—he called me Brad—we were on such terms; and we used to live together in the Rue de la Paix, that beautiful street close by the Place Vendôme, where there's the pillar. You have been at Paris, Miss Macnamara?' asked the ensign, filling his mouth with a half-pound bite of the potato-cake at the same moment.

"Dosy confessed that she had never travelled into any foreign parts except the kingdom of Kerry; and, on the same question being repeated to me, I was obliged to admit that I was in a similar predicament. Brady was triumphant.

" 'It is a loss to any man,' said he, 'not to have been in Paris. I know that city well, and so I ought; but I did many naughty things there.'

" 'O fie!' said Mrs. Macnamara.

" 'Oh, madam,' continued Brady, 'the fact is that the Paris ladies were rather too fond of us English. When I say English I mean Scotch and Irish as well; but, nevertheless, I think Irishmen had more luck than the natives of the other two islands.'

" 'In my geography book,' said Miss Dosy, 'it is put down only as one island, consisting of England, capital London, on the Thames, in the south; and Scotland, capital Edinburgh, on the Forth, in the north; population——'

" 'Gad! you are right,' said Brady, 'perfectly right, Miss Macnamara. I see you are quite a blue. But, as I was saying, it is scarcely possible for a good-looking young English officer to escape the French ladies. And then I played rather deep; on the whole, however, I think I may say I won. Mortgageshire and I broke Frascati's one night—we won a hundred thousand francs at rouge, and fifty-four thousand at roulette. You would have thought the croupiers would have fainted; they tore their hair with vexation. The money, however, soon went again—we could not keep it. As for wine, you have it cheap there, and of a quality which you cannot get in England. At Very's, for example, I drank Chambertin—it is a kind of claret—for three francs two sous a bottle, which was beyond all comparison far superior to what I drank, a couple of months ago, at the Duke of Devonshire's, though his Grace prides himself on that very wine, and sent to a particular bin for a favourite specimen, when I observed to him I had tasted better in Paris. Out of politeness I pretended to approve of his Grace's choice; but I give you my honour—only I would not wish it to reach his Grace's ears—it was not to be compared to what I had at Very's for a moment.'

"So flowed on Brady for a couple of hours. The Tooleries, as he thought proper to call them; the Louvre, with its pictures, the removal of which he deplored as a matter of taste, assuring us that he had used all his influence with the Emperor of Russia and the Duke of Wellington to prevent it, but in vain; the Boulevards, the opera, the theatres, the Champs Elysées, the Montagnes Russes—everything, in short, about Paris was depicted to the astonished mind of Miss Dosy. Then came London—where he belonged to I do not know how many clubs, and cut a most distinguished figure in the fashionable world. He was of the Prince Regent's set, and assured us on his honour that there was never anything so ill founded as the stories afloat to the discredit of that illustrious person. But on what happened at Carlton House he felt obliged to keep silence, the Prince being remarkably strict in exacting a promise from every gentleman whom he admitted to his table not to divulge anything that occurred there, a violation of which promise was the cause of the exclusion of Brummell. As for the Princess of Wales he would rather not say anything.

"And so forth. Now, in those days of my innocence, I believed these stories as gospel, hating the fellow all the while from the bottom of my heart, as I saw that he made a deep impression on Dosy, who sat in open-mouthed wonder, swallowing them down as a common-councilman swallows turtle. But times are changed. I have seen Paris and London since, and I believe I know both villages as well as most men, and the deuce a word of truth did Brady tell in his whole narrative. In Paris, when not at quarters (he had joined some six or eight months after Waterloo), he lived *au cinquantième* in a dog-hole in the Rue Git-le-Cœur (a street at what I may call the Surrey side of Paris) among carters and other such folk; and in London I discovered that his principal domicile was in one of the courts now demolished to make room for the fine new gimcrackery at Charing Cross. It was in Round Court, at a pieman's of the name of Dudfield."

"Dick Dudfield?" said Jack Ginger. "I knew the man well—a most particular friend of mine. He was a duffer besides being a pieman, and was transported some years ago. He is now a flourishing merchant in Australasia, and will, I suppose, in due time be grandfather to a member of Congress."

"There it was that Brady lived then," continued Bob Burke, "when he was hobnobbing with Georgius Quartus, and dancing at Almack's with Lady Elizabeth Conynghame. Faith, the nearest approach he ever made to royalty was when he was put into the King's own Bench, where he sojourned many a long day. What an ass I was to believe a word of such stuff! But, nevertheless, it goes down with the rustics to the present minute. I sometimes sport a duke or so myself, when I find myself among yokels, and I rise vastly in estimation by so doing. What do we come to London or Paris for, but to get some touch of knowing how to do things properly? It would be devilish hard, I think, for Ensign Brady or Ensign Brady's master, to do me nowadays by flamming off titles of high life."

The company did no more than justice to Mr. Burke's experience, by unanimously admitting that such a feat was all but impossible.

"I was," he went on, "a good deal annoyed at my inferiority, and I could not help seeing that Miss Dosy was making comparisons that were rather odious, as she glanced from the gay uniform of the ensign to my habiliments, which, having been perpetrated by a Mallow tailor with a hatchet, or pitchfork, or pickaxe, or some such tool, did not stand the scrutiny to advantage. I was, I think, a better-looking fellow than Brady. Well, well, laugh if you like. I am no beauty, I know; but, then, consider that what I am talking of was sixteen years ago, and more; and a man does not stand the battering I have gone through for these sixteen years with impunity. Do you call the thirty or forty thousand tumblers of punch, in all its varieties, that I have since imbibed, nothing?"

"Yes," said Jack Ginger with a sigh, "there was a song we used to sing on board the *Brimstone*, when cruising about the Spanish Main:

"If Mars leaves his scars, jolly Bacchus as well
Sets his trace on the face, which a toper will tell;
But which a more merry campaign has pursued,
The shedder of wine, or the shedder of blood?

I forget the rest of it. Poor Ned Nixon! It was he who made that song; he was afterwards bit in two by a shark, having tumbled overboard in the cool of the evening, one fine summer day, off Port Royal."

"Well, at all events," said Burke, continuing his narrative, "I thought I was a better-looking fellow than my rival, and was fretted at being sung down. I resolved to outstay him, and, though he sat long enough, I, who was more at home, contrived to remain after him, but it was only to hear him extolled.

" 'A very nice young man,' said Mrs. Macnamara.

" 'An extremely nice young man,' responded Miss Theodosia.

" 'A perfect gentleman in his manners; he puts me quite in mind of my uncle, the late Jerry O'Regan,' observed Mrs. Macnamara.

" 'Quite the gentleman in every particular,' ejaculated Miss Theodosia.

" 'He has seen a great deal of the world for so young a man,' remarked Mrs. Macnamara.

" 'He has mixed in the best society, too,' cried Miss Theodosia.

" 'It is a great advantage to a young man to travel,' quoth Mrs. Macnamara.

" 'And a very great disadvantage to a young man to be always sticking at home,' chimed in Miss Theodosia, looking at me; 'it shuts them out from all chances of the elegance which we have just seen displayed by Ensign Brady of the 48th Foot.'

" 'For my part,' said I, 'I do not think him such an elegant fellow at all. Do you remember, Dosy Macnamara, how he looked when he got up out of the green puddle to-day?'

" 'Mr. Burke,' said she, 'that was an accident that might happen any man. You were thrown yourself this day week, on clearing Jack Falvey's wall, so you need not reflect on Mr. Brady.'

" 'If I was,' said I, 'it was as fine a leap as ever was made; and I was on my mare in half a shake afterwards. Bob Buller of Ballythomas, or Jack Pendergast, or Fergus O'Connor, could not have rode it better. And you too——'

" 'Well,' said she, 'I am not going to dispute with you. I am sleepy, and must get to bed.'

" 'Do, poor chicken,' said Mrs. Macnamara soothingly; 'and, Bob, my dear, I wish it was in your power to go travel, and see the Booleries and the Toolleyvards, and the rest, and then you might be, in course of time, as genteel as Ensign Brady.'

" 'Heigho!' said Miss Dosy, ejecting a sigh. 'Travel, Bob, travel.'

" 'I will,' said I at once, and left the house in the most abrupt manner, after consigning Ensign Brady to the particular attention of Tisiphone, Alecto, and Megæra, all compressed into one emphatic monosyllable."

CHAPTER IV

HOW BOB BURKE, AFTER AN INTERVIEW WITH BARNEY PULVERTAFT, ASCERTAINED THAT HE WAS DESPERATELY IN LOVE WITH MISS THEODOSIA MACNAMARA

"On leaving Dosy's lodgings I began to consult the state of my heart. Am I really, said I, so much in love as to lose my temper if this prating ensign should carry off the lady? I was much puzzled to resolve the question. I walked up and down the Spa Walk, whiffing a cigar, for a quarter of an hour, without being able to come to a decision. At last, just as the cigar was out, my eye caught a light in the window of Barney Pulvertaft the attorney—old Six-and-Eightpence, as we used to call him. I knew he was the confidential agent of the Macnamaras; and, as he had carried on sixteen lawsuits for my father, I thought I had a claim to learn something about the affairs of Miss Dosy. I understood she was an heiress, but had never until now thought of inquiring into the precise amount of her expectancies. Seeing that the old fellow was up, I determined to step over, and found him in the middle of law-papers, although it was then rather late, with a pot-bellied jug of the beehive pattern by his side, full of punch, or rather, I should say, half full, for Six-and-Eightpence had not been idle. His snuff-coloured wig was cocked on one side of his head, his old velveteen breeches open at the knee, his cravat off, his shirt un-buttoned, his stockings half down his lean legs, his feet in a pair of worsted slippers. The old fellow was, in short, relaxed for the night; but he had his pen in his hand.

" 'I am only filling copies of *capiases*, Bob,' said he; 'light and pleasant work, which does not distress one in an evening. There are a few of your friends booked here. What has brought you to me so late to-night? But your father's son is always welcome. Ay, there were few men like your father. Never staggered in a lawsuit in his life; saw it always out to the end, drove it from court to court. If he was beat, why, so much the worse, but he never fretted; if he won, faith! he squeezed the opposite party well. Ay, he was a good-hearted, honest, straightforward man. I wish I had a hundred such clients. So here's his memory anyhow!'

"Six-and-Eightpence had a good right to give the toast, as what constituted the excellence of my father in his eyes had moved most of the good acres of Ballyburke out of the family into the hands of lawyers; but from filial duty I complied with the attorney's request the more readily, because I well knew, from long experience, that his skill in punch-making was unimpeachable. So we talked about my father's old lawsuits, and I got Barney into excellent humour by letting him tell me of the great skill and infinite adroitness which he had displayed upon a multiplicity of occasions. It was not, however, until we were deep in the second jug, and Six-and-Eightpence was beginning to show signs of being *cut*, that I ventured to introduce the subject of my visit. I did it as cautiously as I could, but the old fellow soon found out my drift.

" 'No,' hiccuped he, 'Bob, 'twon't—'twon't—do. Close as green—green wax. Never te-tell profess-profess-professional secrets. Know her expec—hiccup—tances to a ten-ten-penny. So you are after—after—her? Ah, Bo-bob! She'll be a ca-catch—let not a wo-word from me. No—never. Bar-ney Pe-pulverta-taft is game to the last. Never be-betrayed ye-your father. God rest his soul—he was a wo-worthy man.'

"On this recollection of the merits of my sainted sire the attorney wept; and in spite of all his professional determinations, whether the potency of the fluid or the memory of the deceased acted upon him, I got at the facts. Dosy had not more than a couple of hundred pounds in the world—her mother's property was an annuity which expired with herself; but her uncle by the father's side, Mick Macnamara of Kawleash, had an estate of at least five hundred a year, which, in case of his dying without issue, was to come to her, besides a power of money saved; Mick being one who, to use the elegant phraseology of my friend the attorney, would skin a flea for the sake of selling the hide. All this money, ten thousand pounds, or something equally musical, would in all probability go to Miss Dosy; the five hundred pounds a year was hers by entail. Now, as her uncle was eighty-four years old, unmarried, and in the last stage of the palsy, it was a thing as sure as the bank that Miss Dosy was a very rich heiress indeed.

" 'So—so,' said Six-and-Eightpence—'this—this—is strictly confid-dle-confid-confiddledential. Do-do not say a word about it. I ought not to have to-told it—but, you do-dog, you wheedled it out of me. Da-dang it, I co-could not ref-refuse your father's so-son. You are very like him—as I sa-saw him sitting many a ti-time in that cha-chair. But you nev-never will have his spu-spunk in a sho-shoot (suit). There, the lands of Arry-arry-arry-bally-bally-be-beg-clock-clough-macde-de, duagh—confound the wo-word—of Arryballybegcloughmacduagh, the finest bo-bog in the co-country, are ye-yours; but you haven't spu-spunk to go into Cha-chancery for it, like your worthy fa-father, Go-god rest his soul. Blow out that se-second ca-candle, Bo-bob, for I hate waste.'

" 'There's but one in the room, Barney,' said I.

" 'You mean to say,' hiccuped he, 'that I am te-te-tipsy? Well, well, ye-young fe-fellows, well, I am their je-joke. However, as the je-jug is out, you must be je-jogging. Early to bed, and early to rise, is the way to be—. However, le-lend me your arm up the sta-stairs, for they are very slip-slippery to-night.'

"I conducted the attorney to his bedchamber, and safely stowed him into bed, while he kept stammering forth praises of my worthy father, and upbraiding me with want of spunk in not carrying on a Chancery suit begun by him some twelve years before for a couple of hundred acres of bog, the value of which would scarcely have amounted to the price of the parchment expended on it. Having performed this duty, I proceeded homewards, labouring under a variety of sensations.

"How delicious is the feeling of love when it first takes full possession of a youthful bosom! Before its balmy influence vanish all selfish thoughts, all grovelling notions. Pure and sublimated, the soul looks forward to objects beyond self, and merges all ideas of personal identity in aspirations of the felicity to be derived from the being adored. A thrill of rapture pervades the breast; an intense but bland flame permeates every vein—throbs in every pulse. Oh, blissful period! brief in duration, but crowded with thoughts of happiness never to recur again! As I gained the Walk, the moon was high and bright in heaven, pouring a flood of mild light over the trees. The stars shone with sapphire lustre in the cloudless sky; not a breeze disturbed the deep serene. I was alone. I thought of my love—of what else could I think? What I had just heard had kindled my passion for the divine

Theodosia into a quenchless blaze. Yes, I exclaimed aloud, I *do* love her. Such an angel does not exist on the earth. What charms! What innocence! What horsewomanship! Five hundred a year certain! Ten thousand pounds in perspective! I'll repurchase the lands of Ballyburke; I'll rebuild the hunting-lodge in the Galtees; I'll keep a pack of hounds, and live a sporting life. Oh, dear, divine Theodosia, how I *do* adore you! I'll shoot that Brady, and no mistake. How dare he interfere where my affections are so irrevocably fixed?

"Such were my musings. Alas! How we are changed as we progress through the world! That breast becomes arid which once was open to every impression of the tender passion. The rattle of the dice-box beats out of the head the rattle of the quiver of Cupid; and the shuffling of the cards renders the rustling of his wings inaudible. The necessity of looking after a tablecloth supersedes that of looking after a petticoat; and we more willingly make an assignation with a mutton-chop than with an angel in female form. The bonds of love are exchanged for those of the conveyancer; bills take the place of billets; and we do not protest, but are protested against, by a three-and-sixpenny notary. Such are the melancholy effects of age. I knew them not then. I continued to muse full of sweet thoughts, until gradually the moon faded from the sky—the stars went out—and all was darkness. Morning succeeded to night, and on awaking I found that, owing to the forgetfulness in which the thoughts of the fair Theodosia had plunged me, I had selected the bottom step of old Barney Pulvertaft's door as my couch, and was awakened from repose in consequence of his servant-maid (one Norry Mulcahy) having emptied the contents of her washing-tub over my slumbering person.

CHAPTER V

HOW BOB BURKE, AFTER CONSULTATION WITH WOODEN-LEG WADDY, FOUGHT THE DUEL WITH ENSIGN BRADY FOR THE SAKE OF MISS THEODOSIA MACNAMARA

"At night I had fallen asleep fierce in the determination of exterminating Brady; but with the morrow cool reflection came, made probably cooler by the aspersion I had suffered. How could I fight him when he had never given me the slightest affront? To be sure, picking a quarrel is not hard, thank God, in any part of Ireland; but, unless I was quick about it, he might get so deep into the good graces of Dosy, who was as flammable as tinder, that even my shooting him might not be of any practical advantage to myself. Then, besides, he might shoot me; and, in fact, I was not by any means so determined in the affair at seven o'clock in the morning as I was at twelve o'clock at night. I got home, however, dressed, shaved, etc., and turned out. I think, said I to myself, the best thing I can do is to go and consult Wooden-Leg Waddy; and, as he is an early man, I shall catch him now. The thought was no sooner formed than executed; and in less than five minutes I was walking with Wooden-Leg Waddy in his garden at the back of his house, by the banks of the Blackwater.

"Waddy had been in the Hundred-and-First, and had seen much service in that distinguished corps."

"I remember it well during the war," said Anthony Harrison; "we used to call it the Hungry-and-Worst; but it did its duty on a pinch nevertheless."

"No matter," continued Burke; "Waddy had served a good deal, and lost his leg somehow, for which he had a pension besides his half-pay, and he lived in ease and affluence among the bucks of Mallow. He was a great hand at settling and arranging duels, being what we generally call in Ireland a *judgmatical* sort of man—word which, I think, might be introduced with advantage into the English vocabulary. When I called on him, he was smoking his meerschaum as he walked up and down his garden in an old undress coat, and a fur cap on his head. I bade him good morning; to which salutation he answered by a nod and a more prolonged whiff.

" 'I want to speak to you, Wooden-Leg,' said I, 'on a matter which nearly concerns me.' On which I received another nod and another whiff in reply.

" 'The fact is,' said I, 'that there is an Ensign Brady of the 48th quartered here, with whom I have some reason to be angry, and I am thinking of calling him out. I have come to ask your advice whether I should do so or not. He has deeply injured me by interfering between me and the girl of my affections. What ought I to do in such a case?'

" 'Fight him, by all means,' said Wooden-Leg Waddy.

" 'But the difficulty is this: he has offered me no affront, direct or indirect; we have no quarrel whatever; and he has not paid any addresses to the lady. He and I have scarcely been in contact at all. I do not see how I can manage it immediately with any propriety. What then can I do now?'

" 'Do not fight him by any means,' said Wooden-Leg Waddy.

" 'Still these are the facts of the case. He, whether intentionally or not, is coming between me and my mistress, which is doing me an injury perfectly equal to the grossest insult. How should I act?'

" 'Fight him by all means,' said Wooden-Leg Waddy.

" 'But then I fear if I were to call him out on a groundless quarrel, or one which would appear to be such, that I should lose the good graces of the lady, and be laughed at by my friends, or set down as a quarrelsome and dangerous companion.'

" 'Do not fight him then by any means,' said Wooden-Leg Waddy.

" 'Yet, as he is a military man, he must know enough of the etiquette of these affairs to feel perfectly confident that he has affronted me; and the opinion of a military man, standing, as of course he does, in the rank and position of a gentleman, could not, I think, be overlooked without disgrace.'

" 'Fight him by all means,' said Wooden-Leg Waddy.

" 'But then, talking of gentlemen, I own he is an officer of the 48th; but his father is a fish-tackle seller in John Street, Kilkenny, who keeps a three-halfpenny shop where you may buy everything, from a cheese to a cheese-toaster, from a felt hat to a pair of brogues, from a pound of brown soap to a yard of huckaback towels. He got his commission by his father's retiring from the Ormonde interest, and acting as whipper-in to the sham freeholders from Castlecomer; and I am, as you know, of the best blood of the Burkes—straight from the De Burgos themselves; and, when I think of that, I really do not like to meet this Mr. Brady.'

" 'Do not fight him by any means,' said Wooden-Leg Waddy."

"This advice of your friend Waddy to you," said Tom Meggot, interrupting Burke, "much resembles that which Pantagruel gave Panurge on the subject of his marriage, as I heard a friend of mine, Percy, of Gray's Inn, reading to me the other day."

"I do not know the people you speak of," continued Bob; "but such was the advice which Waddy gave me.

" 'Why,' said I, 'Wooden-Leg, my friend, this is like playing battledore and shuttlecock; what is knocked forward with one hand is knocked back with the other. Come, tell me what I ought to do.'

" 'Well,' said Wooden-Leg, taking the meerschaum out of his mouth, '*in dubiis suspice*, etc. Let us decide it by tossing a halfpenny. If it comes down *head*, you fight; if *harp*, you do not. Nothing can be fairer.'

"I assented.

" 'Which,' said he, 'is it to be—two out of three, as at Newmarket, or the first toss to decide?'

" 'Sudden death,' said I, 'and there will soon be an end of it.'

"Up went the halfpenny, and we looked with anxious eyes for its descent, when, unluckily, it struck a gooseberry bush.

" 'I don't like that,' said Wooden-Leg Waddy; 'for it's a token of bad luck. But here goes again.'

"Again the copper soared to the sky, and down it came—*head*.

" 'I wish you joy, my friend,' said Waddy; 'you are to fight. That was my opinion all along, though I did not like to commit myself. I can lend you a pair of the most beautiful duelling pistols ever put into a man's hand—Wogden's, I swear. The last time they were out, they shot Joe Brown of Mount Badger as dead as Harry the Eighth.'

" 'Will you be my second?' said I.

" 'Why, no,' replied Wooden-Leg, 'I cannot; for I am bound over by a rascally magistrate to keep the peace, because I barely broke the head of a blackguard bailiff, who came here to serve a writ on a friend of mine, with one of my spare legs. But I can get you a second at once. My nephew, Major Mug, has just come to me on a few days' visit, and, as he is quite idle, it will give him some amusement to be your second. Look up at his bedroom—you see he is shaving himself.'

"In a short time the Major made his appearance, dressed with a most military accuracy of costume. There was not a speck of dust on his well-brushed blue surtout; not a vestige of hair, except the regulation whiskers, on his closely shaven countenance. His hat was brushed to the most glossy perfection; his boots shone in jetty glow of Day and Martin. There was scarcely an ounce of flesh on his hard and weather-beaten face, and, as he stood upright, you would have sworn that every sinew and muscle of his body was as stiff as whipcord. He saluted us in military style, and was soon put in possession of the case. Wooden-Leg Waddy insinuated that there were hardly as yet grounds for a duel.

" 'I differ,' said Major Mug, 'decidedly. The grounds are ample. I never saw a clearer case in my life, and I have been principal or second in seven-and-twenty. If I recollect your story rightly, Mr. Burke, he gave you an abrupt answer in the field, which was highly derogatory to the lady in question, and impertinently rude to yourself?'

" 'He certainly,' said I, 'gave me what we call a short answer; but I did not notice it at the time, and he has since made friends with the young lady.'

" 'It matters nothing,' observed Major Mug, 'what you may think or she may think. The business is now in *my* hands, and I must see you through it. The first thing to be done is to write him a letter. Send out for paper; let it be gilt-edged, Waddy, that we may do the thing genteelly. I'll dictate, Mr. Burke, if you please.'

"And so he did. As well as I can recollect, the note was as follows:

SPA WALK, MALLOW, *June* 3, 18—
Eight o'clock in the morning.

"SIR:

A desire for harmony and peace, which has at all times actuated my conduct, prevented me yesterday from asking you the meaning of the short and contemptuous message which you commissioned me to deliver to a certain young lady of our acquaintance, whose name I do not choose to drag into a correspondence. But, now that there is no danger of its disturbing any one, I must say that in your desiring me to tell that young lady she might consider herself as d—d, you were guilty of conduct highly unbecoming of an officer and a gentleman, and subversive of the discipline of the hunt.—I have the honour to be, sir, your most obedient humble servant,

"Robert Burke

"P.S. This note will be delivered to you by my friend, Major Mug, of the 3rd West Indian; and you will, I trust, see the propriety of referring him to another gentleman without further delay.

" 'That, I think, is neat,' said the Major. 'Now seal it with wax, Mr. Burke, with wax, and let the seal be your arms. That's right. Now direct it.'

" 'Ensign Brady?'

" 'No, no; the right thing would be, "Mr. Brady, Ensign, 48th Foot," but custom allows "Esquire." That will do: "Thady Brady, Esq., Ensign, 48th Foot, Barracks, Mallow." He shall have it in less than a quarter of an hour.'

"The Major was as good as his word, and in about half an hour he brought back the result of his mission. The Ensign, he told us, was extremely reluctant to fight, and wanted to be off, on the ground that he had meant no offence, did not even remember having used the expression, and offered to ask the lady if she conceived for a moment he had any idea of saying anything but what was complimentary to her.

" 'In fact,' said the Major, 'he at first plumply refused to fight; but I soon brought him to reason. "Sir," said I, "you either consent to fight or refuse to fight. In the first case, the thing is settled to hand, and we are not called upon to inquire if there was an affront or not; in the second case, your refusal to comply with a gentleman's request is of itself an offence for which he has a right to call you out. Put it, then, on any grounds, you must fight him. It is perfectly indifferent to me what the grounds may be; and I have only to request the name of your friend, as I too much respect the coat you wear to think that there can be any other alternative." This brought the chap to his senses, and he referred me to Captain Codd of his own regiment, at which I felt much pleased, because Codd is an intimate friend of my own, he and I having fought a duel three years ago in Falmouth, in which I lost the tip of this little finger, and he his left whisker. It was a near touch. He is as honourable a man as ever paced a ground; and I am sure he will no more let his man off the field until the business is done than I would myself.'

"I own," continued Burke, "I did not half relish this announcement of the firm purpose of our seconds; but I was in for it, and could not get back. I sometimes thought Dosy a dear purchase at such an expense; but it was no use to grumble. Major Mug was sorry to say that there was a review to take place immediately, at which the Ensign must attend, and it was impossible for him to meet me until the evening; 'but,' added he, 'at this time of the year it can be of no great consequence. There will be plenty of light till nine, but I have fixed *seven*. In the meantime you may as well divert yourself with a little pistol-practice; but do it on the sly, as, if they were shabby enough to have a trial, it would not tell well before the jury.'

"Promising to take a quiet chop with me at five, the Major returned, leaving me not quite contented with the state of affairs. I sat down, and wrote a letter to my cousin, Phil Purdon of Kanturk, telling him what I was about, and giving directions what was to be done in the case of any fatal event. I communicated to him the whole story —deplored my unhappy fate in being thus cut off in the flower of my youth—left him three pairs of buckskin breeches—and repented my sins. This letter I immediately packed off by a special messenger, and then began half a dozen others, of various styles of tenderness and sentimentality, to be delivered after my melancholy decease. The day went off fast enough I assure you, and at five the Major and Wooden-Leg Waddy arrived in high spirits.

" 'Here, my boy,' said Waddy, handing me the pistols, 'here are the flutes; and pretty music, I can tell you, they make.'

" 'As for dinner,' said Major Mug, 'I do not much care; but, Mr. Burke, I hope it is ready, as I am rather hungry. We must dine lightly, however, and drink not much. If we come off with flying colours, we may crack a bottle together by and by. In case you shoot Brady, I have everything arranged for our keeping out of the way until the thing blows over; if he shoot you, I'll see you buried. Of course, you would not recommend anything so ungenteel as a prosecution. No. I'll take care it shall all appear in the papers, and announce that Robert Burke, Esq., met his death with becoming fortitude, assuring the unhappy survivor that he heartily forgave him, and wished him health and happiness.'

" 'I must tell you,' said Wooden-Leg Waddy, 'it's all over Mallow, and the whole town will be on the ground to see it. Miss Dosy knows of it, and is quite delighted. She says she will certainly marry the survivor. I spoke to the magistrate to keep out of the way, and he promised that, though it deprived him of great pleasure, he would go and dine five miles off—and know nothing about it. But here comes dinner. Let us be jolly.'

"I cannot say that I played on that day as brilliant a part with the knife and fork as I usually do, and did not sympathise much in the speculations of my guests, who pushed the bottle about with great energy, recommending me, however, to refrain. At last the Major looked at his watch, which he had kept lying on the table before him from the beginning of dinner, started up, clapped me on the shoulder and, declaring it only wanted six minutes and thirty-five seconds of the time, hurried me off to the scene of action, a field close by the Castle.

"There certainly was a miscellaneous assemblage of the inhabitants of Mallow, all anxious to see the duel. They had pitted us like gamecocks, and bets were freely taken as to the chances of our killing one another, and the particular spots. One betted on my being hit in the jaw, another was so kind as to lay the odds on my knee. A tolerably general opinion appeared to prevail that one or other of us was to be killed; and much good-humoured joking took place among them while they were deciding which. As I was double the thickness of my antagonist, I was clearly the favourite for being shot, and I heard one fellow near me say, 'Three to two on Burke, that he's shot first—I bet in ten-pennies.'

"Brady and Codd soon appeared, and the preliminaries were arranged with much punctilio between our seconds, who mutually and loudly extolled each other's gentleman-like mode of doing business. Brady could scarcely stand with fright, and I confess that I did not feel quite as Hector of Troy or the Seven Champions of Christendom are reported to have done on several occasions. At last the ground was measured—the pistols handed to the principals—the handkerchief dropped—whiz! went the bullet within an inch of my ear—and crack! went mine exactly on Ensign Brady's waistcoat pocket. By an unaccountable accident there was a five-shilling piece in that very pocket, and the ball glanced away, while Brady doubled himself down, uttering a loud howl that might be heard half a mile off. The crowd was so attentive as to give a huzza for my success.

"Codd ran up to his principal, who was writhing as if he had ten thousand colics, and soon ascertained that no harm was done.

" 'What do you propose,' said he to my second, 'What do you propose to do, Major?'

" 'As there is neither blood drawn nor bone broken,' said the Major, 'I think that shot goes for nothing.'

" 'I agree with you,' said Captain Codd.

" 'If your party will apologize,' said Major Mug, 'I'll take my man off the ground.'

" 'Certainly,' said Captain Codd, 'you are quite right, Major, in asking the apology; but you know that it is my duty to refuse it.'

" 'You are quite correct, Captain,' said the Major. 'I then formally require that Ensign Brady apologise to Mr. Burke.'

" 'As I formally refuse it,' said Captain Codd.

"'We must have another shot, then,' said the Major.

"'Another shot, by all means,' said the Captain.

"'Captain Codd,' said the Major, 'you have shown yourself in this, as in every transaction of your life, a perfect gentleman.'

"'He who would dare to say,' replied the Captain, 'that Major Mug is not among the most gentlemanlike men in the service would speak what is untrue.'

"Our seconds bowed, took a pinch of snuff together, and proceeded to load the pistols. Neither Brady nor I was particularly pleased at these complimentary speeches of the gentlemen, and I am sure, had we been left to ourselves, would have declined the second shot. As it was, it appeared inevitable.

"Just, however, as the process of loading was completing, there appeared on the ground my cousin Phil Purdon, rattling in on his black mare as hard as he could lick. When he came in sight he bawled out:

"'I want to speak to the plaintiff in this action—I mean to one of the parties in this duel. I want to speak to you, Bob Burke.'

"'The thing is impossible, sir,' said Major Mug.

"'Perfectly impossible, sir,' said Captain Codd.

"'Possible or impossible is nothing to the question,' shouted Purdon; 'Bob, I *must* speak to you.'

"'It is contrary to all regulation,' said the Major.

"'Quite contrary,' said the Captain.

"Phil, however, persisted, and approached me. 'Are you fighting about Dosy Mac.?' said he to me in a whisper.

"'Yes,' replied I.

"'And she is to marry the survivor, I understand?'

"'So I am told,' said I.

"'Back out, Bob, then; back out, at the rate of a hunt. Old Mick Macnamara is married.'

"'Married!' I exclaimed.

"'Poz,' said he. 'I drew the articles myself. He married his housemaid, a girl of eighteen; and'—here he whispered.

"'What,' cried I, 'six months!'

"'Six months,' said he, 'and no mistake.'

"'Ensign Brady,' said I, immediately coming forward, 'there has been a strange misconception in this business. I here declare, in presence of this honourable company, that you have acted throughout like a man of honour and a gentleman; and you leave the ground without a stain on your character.'

"Brady hopped three feet off the ground with joy at the unexpected deliverance. He forgot all etiquette, and came forward to shake me by the hand.

" 'My dear Burke,' said he, 'it must have been a mistake. Let us swear eternal friendship.'

" 'For ever,' said I, 'I resign you Miss Theodosia.'

" 'You are too generous,' he said, 'but I cannot abuse your generosity.'

" 'It is unprecedented conduct,' growled Major Mug. 'I'll never be second to a *Pekin* again.'

" '*My* principal leaves the ground with honour,' said Captain Codd, looking melancholy nevertheless.

" 'Humph!' grunted Wooden-Leg Waddy, lighting his meerschaum.

"The crowd dispersed much displeased, and I fear my reputation for valour did not rise among them. I went off with Purdon to finish a jug at Carmichael's, and Brady swaggered off to Miss Dosy's. His renown for valour won her heart. It cannot be denied that I sunk deeply in her opinion. On that very evening Brady broke his love, and was accepted. Mrs. Mac. opposed, but the red-coat prevailed.

" 'He may rise to be a general,' said Dosy, 'and be a knight, and then I will be Lady Brady.'

" 'Or if my father should be made an earl, angelic Theodosia, you would be Lady Thady Brady,' said the Ensign.

" 'Beautiful prospect!' cried Dosy. 'Lady Thady Brady! What a harmonious sound!'

"But why dally over the detail of my unfortunate love? Dosy and the Ensign were married before the accident which had befallen her uncle was discovered; and, if they be not happy, why, you and I may. They have had eleven children, and, I understand, he now keeps a comfortable eating-house close by Cumberland basin in Bristol. Such was my duel with Ensign Brady of the 48th."

"Your fighting with Brady puts me in mind that the finest duel I ever saw," said Joe Macgillycuddy, "was between a butcher and a bull-dog, in the Diamond of Derry."

"I am obliged to you for your comparison," said Burke, "but I think it is now high time for dinner, and your beautiful story will keep. Has anybody the least idea where 'dinner is to be raised?' "

To this no answer was returned; and we all began to reflect with the utmost intensity.

G. R. GLEIG

(1796–1888)

GEORGE ROBERT GLEIG, son of the Bishop of Brechin, was born at Stirling. As a Snell exhibitioner he went to Balliol College, Oxford, in 1811, but soon left in order to follow a military career. He served in the Peninsula campaign of 1813 and 1814, and was wounded three times, and thrice wounded again in America. After Waterloo, he returned to Oxford, where he graduated and was eventually ordained in 1820. In 1834 Gleig was made chaplain of Chelsea Hospital, whose history he wrote, and in 1844 he became chaplain-general of the Queen's forces, subsequently being appointed, in 1846, inspector-general of military schools. A prolific writer, his best-known works are *The Subaltern* (1826) and his *Life of Wellington* (1826).

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A PYRENEAN ADVENTURE

CHAPTER I

AT the period when the left column of the British army occupied the pass of Irun, the particular regiment of which I was a member, pitched its tents on a sort of platform, or natural terrace, in the side of the Quatracone mountain. The situation of the camp was one of extreme beauty. Sheltered from the rays of the sun by a grove of graceful dwarf oaks, our background was formed by the bald rocks and giant shapes of the mountain, which, tier above tier, and precipice above precipice, rose in barren majesty into the clouds. On either side of our platform was a ravine: that upon the right, abrupt and of considerable depth, was darkened both to its base, and to the brow of the opposite hill, by the foliage of a dense forest; that upon the left, more gradual in its declivity, afforded room for a few cornfields and other cultivated spots, as it sloped away into the level country. In front, again, were the mouth of the pass, the high-road, the Bidassoa, Fontarabia, and the ocean, all of them hemmed in by the heights of Audaye and San Marcial, as to compose one of the most splendid vistas which it has ever been my good fortune to behold.

Whilst the corps was stationed here, and indeed as often as circumstances would allow, it was my custom to wander away from the camp, with a gun over my shoulder, and a dog at my heels, for the double purpose of picking up a little *provend* for the mess, and indulging a spirit of roving and adventure which was then natural to me.

One fine day towards the end of September, in the year 1813, my faithful Juno and her master set out, in high health and spirits, to pursue their wonted occupation.

I have said that on the right of the terrace occupied by our tents was a wooded ravine of considerable depth and steepness. At the bottom of that hollow ran a beautiful rivulet, which, after falling from a sort of detached shoulder of the Quatracone, wound onwards through the valley, till it joined the Bidassoa near the ruined bridge. I had often experienced a desire to trace that stream to its source, partly because I felt satisfied that the labour of the journey would be more than compensated by the magnificence of the scenery to which it must lead, and partly because I longed to shoot one or more of the many eagles, which, from their nests among the cliffs, looked down upon us, as if in anxious expectation of the moment when the fortune of battle should consign us to their talons. This morning I resolved, at all hazards, to gratify that inclination; so, striking off by the rear of the camp, I made at once for the waterfall.

I may not so much as attempt a description of the various and magnificent spectacles, which the progress of that toilsome, and occasionally hazardous excursion, from time to time spread out before me. As long as my route conducted up the face of the cliff, from a basin on the summit of which the rivulet tumbled, I could, as often as I chose to turn round, look down upon towns and villages, cornfields and meadows, tents and ships, redoubts and cottages; but from the instant that the ridge was passed, every vestige of human skill and human exertion was shut out. A long, narrow, winding vale lay beneath me; gloomy with forests, apparently trackless, and of the growth of ages; and girdled in by rocks and precipices hurled into every variety of fantastic shape. On either hand, and far off in my front, hill rose above hill, and cone above cone, as if a thousand earthquakes had been at work, or the globe had never, in this corner at least, escaped from a state of chaos. But words are wanting to describe such a panorama. It is sufficient to observe that, accustomed as I had been, from childhood, to highland scenery, this perfectly astonished me, insomuch that I remained for several minutes riveted to the spot, from which it first burst upon me. Nor was I more struck by the objects which affected my sense of sight, than by the sort of preternatural stillness which prevailed. Either the breezes blew not at all, or the trees and shrubs in the valley were entirely sheltered from them; for not a bough or a leaf was in motion. The only sounds, indeed, which reached me were a sort of indistinct murmur, produced by the waterfall, now many hundred feet below me, and the occasional shrill cry of an eagle, as it sailed overhead, at a height which placed it far beyond the reach of danger from any power except that of the storm.

Having indulged, for some time, the feelings which such a scene was calculated to excite, as well as recovered my breath and rested my limbs, I began to look around for the purpose of ascertaining how I might most easily attain the object of my present ambition, by reaching the top of the mountain. You will understand, that I was now seated upon a sort of sugar-loaf hill, connected on both sides with other hills three or four times more lofty than itself. That upon the right seemed peculiarly rough and uneven; that upon the left, besides that the stream trickled down its surface, was more grassy and accessible; so I resolved to scale it. But I found, on putting my determination into force, that even it was far from being devoid of difficulties. Projections, which, when viewed from a distance, appeared trifling and easy of ascent, proved, when attained to, wholly impervious; whilst the grass itself was in many spots so dry and slippery, as to render it exceedingly hazardous to pass along. Nevertheless, I had proceeded too far to return now. I pushed on, winding round the base of such rocks as I found myself unable to scale, and creeping on all fours, when to walk upright became impossible; and I was rewarded, after two hours and a half of severe labour, by beholding what I took to be the last of the ridges. It was a large perpendicular cone; but there seemed to be a pass, or, as an Highlander would call it, a Balloch, on one side of it, and to that I directed my steps.

I was approaching rapidly to this object of my wishes, when the cry of an eagle, coming, as it appeared to me, from the opposite side of the brow, attracted my attention. In a whisper, I ordered Juno to heel; and putting a ball in one barrel, instead of small shot, I lay down on my belly, and in that position dragged myself towards the summit. I gained it with some difficulty; but you may imagine what my feelings were, when, on peeping over the ridge, I beheld in a sort of narrow glen or hollow, the diameter of which could not exceed twenty or thirty yards, the bones and mutilated remains of not fewer than forty or fifty human beings. Upon these some dozen or two of eagles were sitting;—not in the act of gorging, for in truth nothing now remained upon which they or other carnivorous animals could feed; but scraping and turning the bones about, and with their beaks tearing, as if in mockery, into minute shreds, a few remnants of what had once been military clothing.

So little had I anticipated such a spectacle in these wild regions, that surprise, and, to a certain extent, horror, completely overcame me. I lay with my finger on the trigger, but abstained from firing, till my dog sprang upon the brow, and the alarmed birds, rising in an instant, escaped.

Less annoyed at having thus permitted my prey to elude me, than curious to ascertain how so many bodies could have come into a situation so singular, I looked about for some path or sloping declivity by which I might descend into this place of the dead; but I looked in vain. The skeletons lay in a hole, which I can compare to nothing more nearly than a disused coal-pit of extraordinary dimensions; that is to say, they occupied a spot closed in on three sides by perpendicular rocks. The fourth was, indeed, open, but as far as I could judge, by examining it from my present position, it was open only to a precipice. Having indulged in a few vague conjectures, therefore, and satisfied myself that I could do nothing more, I turned away, and, striking off to the right, soon entered the precincts of a thick wood. Here my dog beginning to quest, I had the satisfaction to find that I had at last arrived where game promised to be abundant. She led the way down the side of the mountain—I followed; and my attention being wholly engrossed, I went on, sometimes firing with success, at other times missing, till the gradual diminution of light warned me that it was high time to think of returning to the camp.

If there be a sportsman here, and a keen one, he will readily comprehend how a man, busied in the pursuit of hares, rabbits, and red-legged partridges, may become wholly unconscious both of the space of ground over which he passes, and the passage of time over his own head. Such, at least, was my case that day. For the last hour or two I had wandered on, through brake and briar, across hill and valley, without taking any note of my bearings, or of the approach of evening; and now I found myself deserted by the sun at the bottom of a tangled glen, and surrounded on all sides by a pathless forest of cork-trees.

To confess the truth, I was very far from being delighted with either my situation or prospects. It failed not to occur to me that I had ventured within the legitimate territories of wolves and bears; and that, as darkness came on, they were not unlikely to resent so bold an intrusion. For aught I knew, the enemy's outposts might be close at hand; and, above all, there was the risk, in case I should venture to seek my way back in the dark, of falling over some one of the numerous precipices, which lay, as I well knew, between me and the camp. The idea that my game-bag was filled hardly sufficed to compensate for these gloomy reflections. But though I sincerely repented of my rashness, and wished myself a thousand times safe and sound in my tent, I by no means lost heart. On the contrary, resolving that no efforts should be wanting on my part, let the consequences be what they might, I gladly took advantage of the slight remains of twilight which still glimmered; and turning my face, as well as I could guess, in the direction of Irun, I strode forward.

But the progress which I had made in this random journey was slight indeed, when a thousand obstacles, of which the rapidly increasing darkness constituted not the least, compelled me to pause. There was no longer light sufficient to distinguish objects at three yards before me; the underwood became more and more rough, and the ground more and more broken; till, at last, all hope of escape from the labyrinth left me. I now looked around for a convenient spot in which I might spend the night: not, indeed, free from apprehension that if I slept, it would be to awake in the clutch of some wild beast, but determined to keep awake as long as possible, and trust the rest to Providence. On my dog I knew that I could rely as a vigilant guardian; and I hoped, with the assistance of my double-barrelled gun, to repel any attack that might be made upon me.

I had arrived at this determination, and was preparing to act in accordance with it, when a couple of chance paces taken to the right brought me, to my no small delight, upon a beaten footpath. Thanking Heaven with all my heart, I at once determined to follow it, let it lead where it might; so I pushed on, though perfectly conscious that I was increasing my distance, at every step, from the tents of my regiment.

I had proceeded thus, as near as I could guess, about a mile and a half, when, the wood ending, I found myself at the corner of a bare green hill, and in the gorge of a valley. It was not, however, without a sense of serious apprehension that I discovered signs of the valley being occupied. A strong light issued from the doorless apertures and broken roof of a ruined cottage a few hundred yards off; and the sound of many voices, distinctly heard in the stillness of evening, gave proof that the ruin in question was filled with people. Who were they?—that was the question which demanded an answer. If Frenchmen, as was by no means improbable, death or captivity would reward my further progress. If Spaniards!—I did not relish that idea much more keenly than the others; for I well knew that Spanish guerillas were seldom very scrupulous when plunder fell in their way. Nevertheless, I resolved to advance at all risks. I did so, my dog keeping close to my heel, and moving, like her master, in profound silence, till the challenge of a sentinel, whom I had not observed, arrested my steps.

"Now, then," thought I, "it only remains for me to sell my life at as dear a rate as possible." I cocked my gun, and stood still. The man challenged again, and I recognised the full broad dialect of a Biscayan. I answered without further delay; upon which the man, commanding me to halt, shouted aloud, and in a moment the picket was under arms. It was soon discovered that I was alone; I was permitted to advance, and, having satisfied my captors that I was an English officer, they conducted me, with much civility, into the house. The officer, however, being absent to arrange his sentries, they could neither furnish me with a guide, nor permit me to depart alone; but they offered me a snug place beside their fire, made no attempt to deprive me of my weapon, and kindly supplied me with what was probably the sole refreshment which they had to offer—a cigar. I was not displeased with this treatment, but sat contentedly enough among them till their commander arrived.

This person, on whose entrance they all rose, was a young man of very peculiar and striking appearance. His hair and moustaches, like those of Spaniards in general, were coal-black, and his complexion was of that deep olive hue which the faces of men much exposed to the sun and winds of a southern climate usually obtain. But there was a brightness and penetration in his eye which pierced through the individual on whom it rested; and a strong expression of daring—I might almost call it ferocity—overspread his whole countenance. In stature he did not greatly exceed the middle size, if indeed he exceeded it at all; but his well-knit limbs, full chest, and broad shoulders indicated a surpassing degree of bodily strength and activity. His dress, too, was abundantly picturesque. A brown cloak, buckled round the neck, fell so far over one shoulder as to expose a rich green uniform beneath it, whilst appended to an embroidered belt, in which, by the way, were stuck a brace of steel-mounted pistols, hung a sabre of unusual size and weight. On his head he wore a richly-laced foraging-cap; a pair of tan-leather boots encased his legs; and to complete his resemblance rather to a robber-chief than a soldier, he carried a short rifle over his right shoulder. I have seldom seen a better subject for a painter than the whole group presented by the light of a large fire of wood.

The Spanish officer stopped short the instant he beheld me, and fixing a keen and half suspicious glance upon me, demanded my quality and business. I informed him on both heads at once, explaining that I had been overtaken by darkness when shooting in the woods hard by, and considered myself fortunate in having arrived at a place from whence a guide might be procured, or, at least, shelter obtained for the night.

"May I believe this fine tale?" said he, in a tone of voice which I was far from relishing. "Here you are, within half-musket-shot of the enemy's lines, professing to have lost your way in an attempt to reach Irun."

I could only reply by repeating my assertion, and by reminding him, that I was quite ignorant of the very points of the compass amid these mountains.

The Spaniard was silent for a moment, and then said, "You are an Englishman, I perceive; and the English are in general honest, as well as brave; but there may be traitors even among them. Perhaps, you are one; perhaps, you designed to desert to the enemy."

Indignant beyond measure at this allegation, I would have picked a quarrel with him on the spot, had not a single glance round the room sufficed to convince me, that such a measure could only end in my own destruction. I repelled it, however, in such a way, as to show him, that he had seriously wounded my feelings; nor was my hint lost upon him. His suspicions appeared to subside, and motioning to me to resume my seat, he put several other questions to me, in more friendly language.

At length, he became satisfied, and desired to know my wishes. I replied, that I required only a guide as far as the camp above Irun, and that I would cheerfully compensate the person who undertook the office. He then said something, not very courteously, it is true, about abiding where I was till morning; but on my declining the invitation, he did not press it. A non-commissioned officer, whom he named Manillo, was accordingly commanded to see me safe; and without having either given or received a salute from this discourteous warrior, I withdrew. Before going, however, I pulled out a hare and a couple of rabbits from my bag, and gave them to the soldiers—a present for which these poor fellows appeared exceedingly thankful.

CHAPTER II

My guide and I continued our journey for some time in silence; till at last, my mind being full of the remarkable appearance, and no less remarkable behaviour, of the Spanish officer, I asked him whether or not he knew anything of his history.

"Yes, sir," replied the man; "I know it all—as well I may; for we were both born in this very valley, and have been friends from our cradles."

"In this valley!" replied I; "did you say in this valley—and that you have been friends from infancy?"

"Even so," answered Manillo, "and might have gone further; I might have added that we were brothers, for Francisco was to have married my sister. Was to have married?—He did marry her, though the hell-hounds tore the marriage-tie asunder."

My curiosity was now excited to the highest pitch, and I entreated my companion to gratify it. He complied, though not without the endurance of considerable pain; and the following is the story which he told me:

"You see these ruined cottages below us," said he: "they are all that remain of the homes of our fathers."

I looked where the soldier pointed; and with the help of the stars which now shone out, beheld eight or ten huts in the hollow beneath. "And now look up," continued my conductor, just as we reached the bottom of a deep cut, or rather an old water-course, in the side of the hill. "Do you observe that high rock, not far from the summit of the mountain?"

I gazed upwards, and saw distinctly enough a bold bare cliff, projecting from amid a thick forest of underwood.

A strange idea crossed my mind at this moment, and I hastily asked whether there was not a deep hollow beyond the precipice? He assented. "And it is full of human bones," continued I. "Aha!" exclaimed the

Spaniard, "have you seen them? Then," added he, violently raising his clenched fist in the air, "you have looked upon the bones of those who butchered our fathers and our children, and violated and murdered our wives and sisters. But you shall hear all.

"Three years have hardly elapsed since the cottages which I lately pointed out to you were inhabited by eight as poor, but as contented families as are to be found in Spain. We had no laws, yet there was not a dishonest person amongst us; and, instead of a magistrate, we looked up to and obeyed Señor Albarcho, because he was the oldest and wisest member of the community. Señor Albarcho, you must know, was the father of our present Captain Francisco, and a better man never walked the earth. We had our priest likewise, one of ourselves, whom we all reverenced and respected. Our business was to tend a few goats, which we all had in common; to cultivate a few fields, the fruits of which we shared in common; to hunt bears and chamois, and to make one another comfortable. We were completely shut out from the rest of the world; but that we never regretted; for our priest told us, and we believed him, that there was no real good in the world of which we were not already possessed.

"You will easily believe, that persons thus situated felt rather like the members of one family, than the inhabitants of the same village; indeed, we composed, properly speaking, but one family; that is, we all married among ourselves, and so became connected by ties of blood, as well as of friendship. Well, sir, an attachment had long subsisted between Francisco and my sister Amante, and the 8th of June, 1810, was fixed for the wedding day. We were not ignorant that at this time the country swarmed with foreign troops; we had even hesitated, more than once, whether we were not bound, as true Spaniards, to take up arms for their expulsion; but our father, as we called Señor Albarcho, protested strongly against it, and we could not go in opposition to his will. We accordingly remained at peace; and as no soldiers came near us, we gradually ceased to believe that King Ferdinand was really driven from his throne.

"I told you that the 8th of June was fixed as the wedding day of Francisco and Amante. We all accompanied them to church, heard them receive the priest's benison, and followed them home; where the remainder of the morning, and some portion of the afternoon, were devoted to sports and merriment. Oh, what an interruption to that mirth took place! We had spread out our supper under the chestnut-tree before the bridegroom's door, and were making ready to partake of it, when the sudden appearance of armed men at the bottom of the valley threw us into the greatest alarm. The women fled into the house; the old men stood irresolute, and the young ran for their rifles. But the hand of God was upon us. These were Frenchmen, sir—bloody, barbarous Frenchmen, who had discovered our peaceful retreat, and came to destroy it for ever. I cannot go on—imagine what followed, if you can. The miscreants sprang upon our women and our goods; we were too feeble, and too few, successfully to oppose them; and we heard in our retreat shrieks to which we could not reply, and wailings which we could not soothe."

The Spaniard became here so violently agitated, that his very voice failed him; but recovering his self-command in a few minutes, he proceeded:

"Nothing now remained for us but vengeance. We betook ourselves, eighteen in number, to the neighbouring fastnesses, and choosing Francisco for our leader, we became guerillas. But we went not beyond the precincts of our own valley. No; our cry, day and night, was for vengeance, and to obtain it, we hovered round the ruins of our houses like beasts of prey. Not a Frenchman strayed from his cantonments who returned alive; and many and many a time have we roused the whole band from their unholy slumbers with our war-shout. Exasperated at this behaviour, the miscreants completed the bloody work which they had begun. Every male, and every aged female, who fell into their hands, perished on the first day; now they butchered, and threw out to us, our wives and little ones. But there was mercy in this; for how could we again receive those whom the dogs had defiled?

"You have seen the hollow on the top of that rock. It is called the Fuente; for tradition says, that it was once a small lake, and that the ravine, across which we passed, was the channel of the river that flowed from it. I know not whether there be truth in this, but its situation is one of the most remarkable in all these districts. You observed how it is enclosed on three sides; on the fourth, there is a fall of many feet; and the rocks stretching out on either hand beyond the fall, render it perfectly inaccessible. At one corner, however, it is separated from the mountain by a chasm of little more than eighteen feet in width; we laid a narrow bridge of plank over the chasm, and made the old lake our fortress. From this point we were in the daily habit of sallying out upon the enemy; and at last we made it the scene of a glorious revenge.

"At the suggestion of our leader, we determined, if it were possible, to lure the monsters into our den, and to destroy them there. For this purpose, we laboured hard at a huge rock, which hung immediately over our bridge, till we had so loosened it, as that a push from the arm of a child would roll it down the gulf. That being effected, we proceeded to carry the rest of our scheme into execution, thus: One morning, as usual, we rushed down upon the valley, and having maintained a skirmish rather longer and more animated than usual, the bloodhounds were so enraged as to pursue us up the hill. As soon as we reached the forest, all except Francisco, who was the object of their bitterest hatred, avoided the old channel, and escaped into the woods. Francisco, affecting to be wounded, made for the bridge. He crossed, and forty-five of the miscreants, including their commander, followed. This was all that we desired. Instantly the crag fell, and striking the planks exactly in the middle, it dashed them down into the abyss, cutting off all hope of escape from those within the Fuente.

"In the meanwhile we had taken our stations on the ridges, and looked down in savage exultation upon our prey. For Francisco we feared nothing, because we knew his intention; and we shouted aloud in order to give him an opportunity of carrying it into effect. We were successful. Whilst the Frenchmen, paralysed with horror, were gazing upwards upon the death which hung over them, Francisco, uttering a loud cry, ran towards the chasm, and with one desperate bound, cleared it. Oh, sir, had you seen the expression of the murderers' countenances then; had you beheld their uplifted hands, and heard their scream for mercy, your blood would have boiled within you, as mine boils now! Our captain answered them. "Mercy!" cried he, "ay, such mercy as ye granted. Look down, fiends, upon the village ye have destroyed! behold the bodies of the aged and the feeble whom ye have butchered! listen to the cry of those whom ye have violated!—and now take your reward." This was the signal, and we opened our fire upon them. It was in vain that they ran from side to side, seeking for a place of shelter or escape, or reached the brink of the chasm in hopeless despair. Three wretches only tried the leap, and they were dashed to pieces. The rest died, one after another, as our bullets took effect; and we left them where they fell, that their bones might bleach in the rains of heaven, after their flesh should have been devoured by the eagles."

The Spaniard here ended his story, and to my astonishment I found that we were already in the camp. I offered him money, but he refused it: indeed he seemed like one beside himself with the recollection of the scenes which he had been describing. Having satisfied me that I was at home, he abruptly turned away, and I could hear the boughs and leaves crash before him, as with the speed of a racehorse he rushed down the glen.

SAMUEL LOVER

(1797–1868)

SAMUEL LOVER was born in Dublin and educated privately in that city. His father, a stockbroker, put him into his office, but the young man had no taste for business. He leaned, in the first instance, to painting, especially miniature-painting, for which he had a decided talent, and which until 1833 provided him with a living. The success of the best of his ballads, "Rory O'More," inclined him to literature. He was one of the founders of the *Dublin University Magazine*, 1833, to which he contributed several of his Irish tales. His principal novels are *Rory O'More, A National Romance* (1836), *Handy Andy* (1842) and *Treasure Trove* (1844). He was also the author of many plays.

"King O'Toole and St. Kevin: A Legend of Glendalough" is reprinted from *Legends and Stories of Ireland* (1831).

KING O'TOOLE AND ST. KEVIN

A Legend of Glendalough

By that lake, whose gloomy shore
Skylark never warbles o'er,
Where the cliff hangs high and steep,
Young Saint Kevin stole to sleep.
—Moore.

WHO has not read of St. Kevin, celebrated as he has been by Moore in the melodies of his native land, with whose wild and impassioned music he has so intimately entwined his name? Through him, in the beautiful ballad whence the epigraph of this story is quoted, the world already knows that the skylark, through the intervention of the saint, never startles the morning with its joyous note in the lonely valley of Glendalough. In the same ballad, the unhappy passion which the saint inspired, and the "unholy blue" eyes of Kathleen, and the melancholy fate of the heroine by the saint's being "unused to the melting mood," are also celebrated; as well as the superstitious *finale* of the legend, in the spectral appearance of the lovelorn maiden:

And her ghost was seen to glide
Gently o'er the fatal tide.

Thus has Moore given, within the limits of a ballad, the spirit of two legends of Glendalough, which otherwise the reader might have been put to the trouble of reaching after a more roundabout fashion. But luckily for those coming after him, one legend he has left to be

—touched by a hand more unworthy—

and instead of a lyrical essence, the raw material in prose is offered, nearly *verbatim* as it was furnished to me by that celebrated guide and *bore*, Joe Irwin, who traces his descent in a direct line from the old Irish kings, and warns the public in general that "there's a power of them spalpeens sthravaigin' about, sthrivin' to put their *comether* upon the quol'ty, (quality)* and callin' themselves Irwin (knowin', the thieves o' the world, how his name had gone far and near, as the rale guide), for to deceave dacent people; but never to b'lieve the likes—for it was only mulvatherin people they wor." For my part, I promised never to put faith in any but himself; and the old rogue's self-love being satisfied, we set out to explore the wonders of Glendalough. On arriving at a small ruin, situated on the southeastern side of the lake, my guide assumed an air of importance, and led me into the ivy-covered remains, through a small square doorway, whose simple structure gave evidence of its early date; a lintel of stone lay across two upright supporters after the fashion of such remains in Ireland.

"This, sir," said my guide, putting himself in an attitude, "is the chapel of King O'Toole—av coorse y' iv often heerd o' King O'Toole, your honour?"

"Never," said I.

"Musha, thin, do you tell me so?" said he; "by gor, I thought all the world, far and near, heerd o' King O'Toole—well! well!! but the darkness of mankind is ontellible. Well, sir, you must know as you didn't hear it afore, that there was wanst a king, called King O'Toole, who was a fine ould king in the ould ancient times, long ago; and it was him that owned the Churches in the airly days."

"Surely," said I, "the Churches were not in King O'Toole's time?"

"Oh, by no manes, your honour—throth, it's yourself that's right enough there; but you know the place is called 'The Churches,' bekase they wor built *afther* by Saint Kavin, and wint by the name o' the Churches iver more; and, therefore, av coorse, the place bein' so called, I say that the king owned the Churches—and why not, sir, seein' 'twas his birthright, time out o' mind, beyant the flood? Well, the king, you see, was the right sort—he was the *rale* boy, and loved sport as he loved his life, and huntin' in partic'lar; and from the risin' o' the sun, up he got, and away he wint over the mountains beyant afther the deer: and the fine times them wor; for the deer was as plinty thin, aye throth, far plintyer than the sheep is now; and that's the way it was with the king, from the crow o' the cock to the song o' the redbreast.

"In this counthry, sir," added he, speaking parenthetically in an undertone, "we think it onlooky to kill the redbreast, for the robin is God's own bird."

Then, elevating his voice to its former pitch, he proceeded:

"Well, it was all mighty good, as long as the king had his health; but, you see, in coorse o' time, the king grewn ould, by raison he was stiff in his limbs, and when he got sthricken in years, his heart failed him, and he was lost intirely for want o' divarshin, bekase he couldn't go a-huntin' no longer; and, by dad, the poor king was obleeged at last for to get a goose to divart him."

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* The Irish peasantry very generally call the higher orders "quality."

Here an involuntary smile was produced by this regal mode of recreation, "the royal game of goose."

"Oh, you may laugh, if you like," said he, half affronted, "but it's thruth I'm tellin' you; and the way the goose divarted him was this-a-way: you see, the goose used for to swim acrass the lake, and go down divin' for throut (and not finer throut in all Ireland, than the same throut), and cotch fish on a Friday for the king, and flew every other day round about the lake divartin' the poor king, that you'd think he'd break his sides laughin' at the frolicksome tricks av his goose; so, in coorse o' time, the goose was the greatest pet in the counthry, and the biggest rogue, and divarted the king to no end, and the poor king was as happy as the day was long. So that's the way it was; and all went on mighty well, antil, by dad, the goose got sthricken in years, as well as the king, and grewn stiff in the limbs, like her masther, and couldn't divart him no longer; and then it was that the poor king was lost complate, and didn't know what in the wide world to do, seein' he was gone out of all divarshin, by raison that the goose was no more in the flower of her blume.

"Well, the king was nigh hand broken-hearted, and melancholy intirely, and was walkin' one mornin' by the edge of the lake, lamentin' his cruel fate, an' thinkin' o' drownin' himself, that could get no divarshin in life, when all of a suddint, turnin' round the corner beyant, who should he meet but a mighty dacent young man comin' up to him.

" 'God save you,' says the king (for the king was a civil-spoken gintleman, by all accounts), 'God save you,' says he to the young man.

" 'God save you kindly,' says the young man to him back again; 'God save you,' says he, 'King O'Toole.'

" 'Thrue for you,' says the king, 'I am King O'Toole,' say he, 'prince and plennypennytinchery o' these parts,' says he; 'but how kem ye to know that?' says he.

"Oh, never mind,' says Saint Kavin.

"For you see," said old Joe, in his undertone again, and looking very knowingly, "it *was* Saint Kavin, sure enough—the saint himself in disguise, and nobody else. 'Oh, never mind,' says he, 'I know more than that,' says he, 'nor twice that.'

" 'And who are you?' said the king, 'that makes so bowld—who are you, at all at all?'

" 'Oh, never you mind,' says Saint Kavin, 'who I am; you'll know more o' me before we part, King O'Toole,' says he.

" 'I'll be proud o' the knowledge o' your acquaintance, sir,' says the king, mighty p'lite.

" 'Troth, you may say that,' says Saint Kavin. 'And now, may I make bowld to ax, how is your goose, King O'Toole?' says he.

" 'Blur-an-agers, how kem you to know about my goose?' says the king.

" 'Oh, no matther; I was given to understand it,' says Saint Kavin.

" 'Oh, that's a folly to talk,' says the king; 'bekase myself and my goose is private frinds,' says he, 'and no one could tell you,' says he, 'barrin' the fairies.'

" 'Oh, thin, it wasn't the fairies,' says Saint Kavin; 'for I'd have you to know,' says he, 'that I don't keep the likes o' sitch company.'

" 'You might do worse then, my gay fellow,' says the king; 'for it's *they* could show you a crock o' money as aisy as kiss hand; and that's not to be sneezed at,' says the king, 'by a poor man,' says he.

" 'Maybe I've a betther way of making money myself,' says the saint.

" 'By gor,' says the king, 'barrin' you're a coiner,' says he, 'that's impossible!'

" 'I'd scorn to be the like, my lord!' says Saint Kavin, mighty high, 'I'd scorn to be the like,' says he.

" 'Then, what are you?' says the king, 'that makes money so aisy, by your own account?'

" 'I'm an honest man,' says Saint Kavin.

" 'Well, honest man,' says the king, 'and how is it you make your money so aisy?'

" 'By makin' ould things as good as new,' says Saint Kavin.

" 'Is it a tinker you are?' says the king.

" 'No,' says the saint; 'I'm no tinker by thrade, King O'Toole; I've a betther thrade than a tinker,' says he. 'What would you say,' says he, 'if I made your ould goose as good as new?'

"My dear, at the word o' making his goose as good as new, you'd think the poor ould king's eyes was ready to jump out iv his head. 'And,' says he, 'troth thin I'd give you more money nor you could count,' says he, 'if you did the like; and I'd be behoulden to you into the bargain.'

" 'I scorn your dirty money,' says Saint Kavin.

" 'Faith then, I'm thinkin' a thrifle o' change would do you no harm,' says the king, lookin' up sly at the old *caubeen* that Saint Kavin had on him.

" 'I have a vow agin it,' says the saint; 'and I am book sworn,' says he, 'never to have goold, silver, or brass in my company.'

" 'Barrin' the thrifle you can't help,' says the king, mighty '*cute*,* and looking him straight in the face.

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* Cunning—an abbreviation of acute.

" 'You just hot it,' says Saint Kavin; 'but though I can't take money,' says he, 'I could take a few acres o' land, if you'd give them to me.'

" 'With all the veins o' my heart,' says the king, 'if you can do what you say.'

" 'Thry me!' says Saint Kavin. 'Call down your goose here,' says he, 'and I'll see what I can do for her.'

"With that, the king whistled, and down kem the poor goose, all as one as a hound, waddlin' up to the poor ould cripple, her masther, and as like him as two *pays*. The minute the saint clapt his eyes an the goose, 'I'll do the job for you,' says he, 'King O'Toole!'

" 'By *Jaminee*,' says King O'Toole, 'if you do, but I'll say you're the cleverest fellow in the sivin parishes.'

" 'Oh, by dad,' says Saint Kavin, 'you must say more nor that—my horn's not so soft all out,' says he, 'as to repair your ould goose for nothin'; what'll you gi' me, if I do the job for you?—that's the chat,' says Saint Kavin.

" 'I'll give you whatever you ax,' says the king; 'isn't that fair?'

" 'Divil a fairer,' says the saint; 'that's the way to do business. Now,' says he, 'this is the bargain I'll make with you, King O'Toole: will you gi' me all the ground the goose flies over, the first offer,* afther I make her as good as new?'

" 'I will,' says the king.

" 'You won't go back o' your word?' says Saint Kavin.

" 'Honour bright!' says King O'Toole, howldin' out his fist."

Here old Joe, after applying his hand to his mouth, and making a sharp, blowing sound (something like "*thp*"), extended it to illustrate the action.†

" 'Honour bright,' says Saint Kavin, back again, 'it's a bargain,' says he. 'Come here!' says he to the poor ould goose, 'come here, you unfort'nate ould cripple,' says he, 'and it's *I* that 'ill make you the sportin' bird.'

"With that, my dear, he tuk up the goose by the two wings—'criss o' my crass an' you,' says he, markin' her to grace with the blessed sign at the same minute—and throwin' her up in the air. 'Whew!' says he, jist givin' her a blast to help her; and with that, my jewel, she tuk to her heels, flyin' like one o' the aigles themselves, and cuttin' as many capers as a swallow before a shower of rain. Away she wint down there, right forninst you, along the side o' the clift, and flew over Saint Kavin's bed (that is where Saint Kavin's bed is *now*, but was not *thin*, by raison it wasn't made, but was conthrived afther by Saint Kavin himself, that the women might lave him alone), and on with her undher Lugduff, and round the ind av the lake there, far beyant where you see the watherfall (though indeed it's no watherfall at all now, but only a poor dhribble iv a thing; but if you seen it in the winther, it id do your heart good, and it roarin' like mad, and as white as the dhriven snow, and rowlin' down the big rocks before it, all as one as childher playin' marbles)—and on with her thin right over the lead mines o' Luganure (that is where the lead mines is *now*, but was not *thin*, by raison they worn't discovered, *but was all goold in Saint Kavin's time*). Well, over the ind o' Luganure she flew, stout and studdy, and round the other ind av the *little* lake, by the Churches (that is, *av coorse*, where the Churches is *now*, but was not *thin*, by raison they wor not built, but aftherwards by Saint Kavin), and over the big hill here over your head, where you see the big clift—(and that clift in the mountain was made by *Fan Ma Cool* where he cut it acrass with a big swoord, that he got made a-purpose by a blacksmith out o' Rathdrum, a cousin av his own, for to fight a joyant [giant] that darr'd him and the Curragh o' Kildare; and he thried the swoord first an the mountain, and cut it down into a gap, as is plain to this day; and faith, sure enough, it's the same sauce he sarv'd the joyant, soon and suddent, and chopped him in two like a pratie, for the glory of his sowl and ould Ireland)—well, down she flew, over the clift, and fluttherin' over the wood there at Poulanass (where I showed you the purty watherfall—and by the same token, last Thursday was a twelve-month sence, a young lady, Miss Rafferty by name, fell into the same watherfall, and was nigh hand drownded—and indeed would be to this day, but for a young man that jumped in afther her; indeed a smart slip iv a young man he was—he was out o' Francis-street, I hear, and coorted her sence, and they wor married, I'm given to undherstand—and indeed a purty couple they wor). Well—as I said—afther flutterin' over the wood a little bit, to *plaze* herself, the goose flew down, and lit at the fut o' the king, as fresh as a daisy, afther flyin' roun' his dominions, just as if she hadn't flew three perch.

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* First effort or attempt.

† This royal mode of concluding a bargain has descended in its original purity from the days of King O'Toole to the present time, and is constantly practised by the Irish peasantry. We believe something of *luck* is attributed to this same sharp blowing we have noticed, and which, for the sake of "ears polite," we have not ventured to call by its right name; for, to speak truly, a slight escapement of saliva takes place at the time. It is thus hansel is given and received; and many are the virtues attributed by the lower order of the Irish to "fasting spittle."

"Well, my dear, it was a beautiful sight to see the king standin' with his mouth open, lookin' at his poor ould goose flyin' as light as a lark, and betther nor ever she was: and when she lit at his fut, he patted her an the head, and '*mavourneen*,' says he, 'but you are the *darlint* o' the world.'

" 'And what do you say to me,' says Saint Kavin, 'for makin' her the like?'

" 'By gor,' says the king, 'I say nothin' bates the art o' man, barrin' * the bees.'

" 'And do you say no more nor that?' says Saint Kavin.

" 'And that I'm behoulden to you,' says the king.

" 'But will you gi'e me all the ground the goose flewn over?' says Saint Kavin.

" 'I will,' says King O'Toole, 'and you're welkim to it,' says he, 'though it's the last acre I have to give.'

" 'But you'll keep your word thrue?' says the saint.

" 'As thrue as the sun,' says the king.

" 'It's well for you,' says Saint Kavin, mighty sharp, 'it's well for you, King O'Toole, that you said that word,' says he, 'for if you didn't say that word, *the divil receave the bit o' your goose id ever fly agin,*' says Saint Kavin.

"Oh, you needn't laugh," says old Joe, half offended at detecting the trace of a suppressed smile; "you needn't laugh, for it's thruth I'm telling you.

"Well, whin the king was as good as his word, Saint Kavin was *plazed* with him, and thin it was that he made himself known to the king. 'And,' says he, 'King O'Toole, you're a dacent man,' says he; 'for I only kem here to *thry you.* You don't know me,' says he, 'bekase I'm disguised.' †

" 'Troth, then, you're right enough,' says the king, 'I didn't perceave it,' says he; 'for indeed I never seen the sign o' sper'ts an you.'

" 'Oh! that's not what I mane,' says Saint Kavin; 'I mane I'm deceavin' you all out, and that I'm not myself at all.'

" 'Musha! thin,' says the king, 'if you're not yourself, who are you?'

" 'I'm Saint Kavin,' said the saint, blessin' himself.

" 'Oh, Queen iv Heaven!' says the king, makin' the sign o' the crass betune his eyes, and fallin' down on his knees before the saint. 'Is it the great Saint Kavin,' says he, 'that I've been discoorsin' all this time without knowin' it,' says he, 'all as one as if he was a lump iv a *gossoon?*—and so you're a saint?' says the king.

" 'I am,' says Saint Kavin.

" 'By gor, I thought I was only talking to a dacent boy,' ‡ says the king.

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* *Barring* is constantly used by the Irish peasantry for *except.*

† A person in a state of drunkenness is said to be *disguised.*

‡ The English reader must not imagine the saint to have been very juvenile, from this expression of the king's. In Ireland, a man in the prime of life is called a "stout *boy.*"

" 'Well, you know the differ now,' says the saint. 'I'm Saint Kavin,' says he, 'the greatest of all the saints.'

"For Saint Kavin, you must know, sir," added Joe, treating me to another parenthesis, "Saint Kavin is counted the greatest of all the saints, bekase he went to school with the prophet Jeremiah.

"Well, my dear, that's the way that the place kem, all at wanst, into the hands of Saint Kavin; for the goose flewn round every individyial acre o' King O'Toole's property you see, *bein' let into the saycret* by Saint Kavin, who was mighty *'cute;* and so, when he *done* the ould king out iv his property for the glory of God, he was *plazed* with him, and he and the king was the best o' frinds iver more afther (for the poor ould king was *doatin'*, you see), and the king had his goose as good as new, to divart him as long as he lived: and the saint supported him afther he kem into his property, as I tould you, antil the day iv his death—and that was soon afther; for the poor goose thought he was ketchin' a throut one Friday; but, my jewel, it was a mistake he made—and instead of a throut, it was a thievin' horse-eel; * and, by gor, instead iv the goose killin' a throut for the king's supper,—by dad, the eel killed the king's goose—and small blame to him; but he didn't ate her, bekase he darn't ate what Saint Kavin laid his blessed hands on.

"Howsumdever, the king never recovered the loss iv his goose, though he had her stuffed (I don't mane stuffed with praties and inyans, but as a curiosity), and presarved in a glass-case for his own divarshin; and the poor king died on the next Michaelmas-day, which was remarkable.—*Throth, it's thruth I'm tellin' you*—and when he was gone, Saint Kavin gev him an illigant wake and a beautiful berrin'; and more betoken, he *said mass for his sowl and tuk care av his goose.*"

MARY SHELLEY

(1797–1851)

MARY WOLLSTONECRAFT SHELLEY was the only daughter of William Godwin the elder and his wife, Mary Wollstonecraft. In the winter of 1812 she first met Shelley, and in the following July they left England together. The poet's first wife died three years later and he at once married Mary Godwin. It was natural that she should be interested in letters, and she herself began to write. Her masterpiece is *Frankenstein* (1818), and Dr. Garnett puts it that "nothing but an absolute magnetizing of her brain by Shelley's can account for her having risen so far above her usual self." Other works from her pen are *Valperga* (1823), *The Last Man* (1826), *Perkin Warbeck* (1830) and *Falkner* (1837).

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* Eels of uncommon size are said to exist in the upper lake of Glendalough: the guides invariably tell marvellous stories of them: they describe them of forbidding aspect, with manes as large as a horse's. One of these "Slippery Rogues" is said to have amused himself by entering a pasture on the borders of the lake, and eating a *cow*—maybe 'twas a *bull.*

"The Parvenue" is reprinted from *Tales and Stories.*

THE PARVENUE

WHY do I write my melancholy story? Is it as a lesson, to prevent any other from wishing to rise to rank superior to that in which they are born? No! miserable as I am, others might have been happy, I doubt not, in my position: the chalice has been poisoned for me alone! Am I evil-minded—am I wicked? What have been my errors, that I am now an outcast and wretched? I will tell my story—let others judge me; my mind is bewildered, I cannot judge myself.

My father was land steward to a wealthy nobleman. He married young, and had several children. He then lost his wife, and remained fifteen years a widower, when he married again a young girl, the daughter of a clergyman, who died, leaving a numerous offspring in extreme poverty. My maternal grandfather had been a man of sensibility and genius; my mother inherited many of his endowments. She was an angel on earth; all her works were charity, all her thoughts were love.

Within a year after her marriage, she gave birth to twins—I and my sister; soon after she fell into ill health, and from that time was always weakly. She could endure no fatigue, and seldom moved from her chair. I see her now—her white, delicate hands employed in needlework, her soft, love-lighted eyes fixed on me. I was still a child when my father fell into trouble, and we removed from the part of the country where we had hitherto lived, and went to a distant village, where we rented a cottage, with a little land adjoining. We were poor, and all the family assisted each other. My elder half-sisters were strong, industrious, rustic young women, and submitted to a life of labour with great cheerfulness. My father held the plough, my half-brothers worked in the barns; all was toil, yet all seemed enjoyment.

How happy my childhood was! Hand in hand with my dear twin sister, I plucked the spring flowers in the hedges, turned the hay in the summer meadows, shook the apples from the trees in the autumn, and at all seasons, gambolled in delicious liberty beneath the free air of heaven; or at my mother's feet, caressed by her, I was taught the sweetest lessons of charity and love. My elder sisters were kind; we were all linked by strong affection. The delicate, fragile existence of my mother gave an interest to our monotony, while her virtues and her refinement threw a grace over our homely household.

I and my sister did not seem twins, we were so unlike. She was robust, chubby, full of life and spirits; I, tall, slim, fair, and even pale. I loved to play with her, but soon grew tired, and then I crept to my mother's side, and she sang me to sleep, and nursed me in her bosom, and looked on me with her own angelic smile. She took pains to instruct me, not in accomplishments, but in all real knowledge. She unfolded to me the wonders of the visible creation, and to each tale of bird and beast, of fiery mountain or vast river, was appended some moral, derived from her warm heart and ardent imagination. Above all, she impressed upon me the precepts of the gospel, charity to every fellow-creature, the brotherhood of mankind, the rights that every sentient creature possesses to our services. I was her almoner; for, poor as she was, she was the benefactress of those who were poorer. Being delicate, I helped her in her task of needlework, while my sister aided the rest in their household or rustic labours.

When I was seventeen, a miserable accident happened. A hayrick caught fire; it communicated to our outhouses, and at last to the cottage. We were roused from our beds at midnight, and escaped barely with our lives. My father bore out my mother in his arms, and then tried to save a portion of his property. The roof of the cottage fell in on him. He was dug out after an hour, scorched, maimed, crippled for life.

We were all saved, but by a miracle only was I preserved. I and my sister were awoke by cries of fire. The cottage was already enveloped in flames. Susan, with her accustomed intrepidity, rushed through the flames, and escaped; I thought only of my mother, and hurried to her room. The fire raged around me; it encircled—hemmed me in. I believed that I must die, when suddenly I felt myself seized upon and borne away. I looked on my preserver—it was Lord Reginald Desborough.

For many Sundays past, when at church, I knew that Lord Reginald's eyes were fixed on me. He had met me and Susan in our walks; he had called at our cottage. There was fascination in his eye, in his soft voice and earnest gaze, and my heart throbbed with gladness, as I thought that he surely loved me. To have been saved by him was to make the boon of life doubly precious.

There is to me much obscurity in this part of my story. Lord Reginald loved me, it is true; why he loved me, so far as to forget pride of rank and ambition for my sake, he who afterwards showed no tendency to disregard the prejudices and habits of rank and wealth, I cannot tell; it seems strange. He had loved me before, but from the hour that he saved my life, love grew into an overpowering passion. He offered us a lodge on his estate to take refuge in; and while there, he sent us presents of game, and still more kindly, fruits and flowers to my mother, and came himself, especially when all were out except my mother and myself, and sat by us and conversed. Soon I learnt to expect the soft asking look of his eyes, and almost dared to answer it. My mother once perceived these glances, and took an opportunity to appeal to Lord Reginald's good feelings, not to make me miserable for life, by implanting an attachment that could only be productive of unhappiness. His answer was to ask me in marriage.

I need not say that my mother gratefully consented; that my father, confined to his bed since the fire, thanked God with rapture; that my sisters were transported by delight; I was the least surprised then, though the most happy. Now, I wonder much, what could he see in me? So many girls of rank and fortune were prettier. I was an untaught, low-born, portionless girl. It was very strange.

Then I only thought of the happiness of marrying him, of being loved, of passing my life with him. My wedding day was fixed. Lord Reginald had neither father nor mother to interfere with his arrangements. He told no relation; he became one of our family during the interval. He saw no deficiencies in our mode of life—in my dress; he was satisfied with all; he was tender, assiduous, and kind, even to my elder sisters; he seemed to adore my mother, and became a brother to my sister Susan. She was in love, and asked him to intercede to gain her parents' consent for her choice. He did so; and though before, Lawrence Cooper, the carpenter of the place, had been disdained, supported by him, he was accepted. Lawrence Cooper was young, well-looking, well disposed, and fondly attached to Susan.

My wedding day came. My mother kissed me fondly, my father blessed me with pride and joy, my sisters stood round, radiant with delight. There was but one drawback to the universal happiness—that immediately on my marriage I was to go abroad.

From the church door I stepped into the carriage. Having once and again been folded in my dear mother's embrace, the wheels were in motion, and we were away. I looked out from the window; there was the dear group: my old father, white-headed and aged, in his large chair; my mother, smiling through her tears, with folded hands and upraised looks of gratitude, anticipating long years of happiness for her child; Susan and Lawrence standing side by side, unenvious of my greatness, happy in themselves; my sisters conning over with pride and joy the presents made to them, and the prosperity that flowed in from my husband's generosity. All looked happy, and it seemed as if I were the cause of all this happiness. We had been indeed saved from dreadful evils; ruin had ensued from the fire, and we had sunk in adversity through that very event from which our good fortune took its rise. I felt proud and glad. I loved them all. I thought, I make them happy—they are prosperous through me! And my heart warmed with gratitude towards my husband at the idea.

We spent two years abroad. It was rather lonely for me, who had always been surrounded, as it were, by a populous world of my own, to find myself cast upon foreigners and strangers; the habits of the different sexes in the higher ranks so separate them from each other, that, after a few months, I spent much of my time in solitude. I did not repine; I had been brought up to look upon the hard visage of life, if not unflinchingly, at least with resignation. I did not expect perfect happiness. Marriages in humble life are attended with so much care. I had none of this: my husband loved me; and though I often longed to see the dear familiar faces that thronged my childhood's home, and, above all, pined for my mother's caresses and her wise maternal lessons, yet for a time I was content to think of them, and hope for a reunion.

Still many things pained me. I had, poor myself, been brought up among the poor, and nothing, since I can remember forming an idea, so much astonished and jarred with my feelings as the thought of how the rich could spend so much on themselves, while any of their fellow-creatures were in destitution. I had none of the patrician charity (though such is praiseworthy), which consists in distributing thin soup and coarse flannel petticoats—a sort of instinct or sentiment of justice, the offspring of my lowly paternal hearth, and my mother's enlightened piety, was deeply implanted in my mind, that all had as good a right to the comforts of life as myself, or even as my husband. My charities, they were called—they seemed to me the payment of my debts to my fellow-creatures—were abundant. Lord Reginald peremptorily checked them; but as I had a large allowance for my own expenses, I denied myself a thousand luxuries, for the sake of feeding the hungry. Nor was it only that charity impelled me, but that I could not acquire a taste for spending money on myself—I disliked the apparatus of wealth. My husband called my ideas sordid, and reproved me severely, when, instead of outshining all competitors at a fête, I appeared dowdily dressed, and declared warmly that I could not, I would not, spend twenty guineas on a gown, while I could dress many sad faces in smiles and bring much joy to many drooping hearts, by the same sum.

Was I right? I firmly believe that there is not one among the rich who will not affirm that I did wrong; that to please my husband, and do honour to his rank, was my first duty. Yet, shall I confess it? even now, rendered miserable by this fault—I cannot give it that name—I can call it a misfortune—I have wasted at the slow fire of knowing that I lost my husband's affections because I performed what I believed to be a duty.

But I am not come to that yet. It was not till my return to England that the full disaster crushed me. We had often been applied to for money by my family, and Lord Reginald had acceded to nearly all their requests. When we reached London, after two years' absence, my first wish was to see my dear mother. She was at Margate for her health. It was agreed that I should go there alone, and pay a short visit. Before I went, Lord Reginald told me what I did not know before, that my family had often made exorbitant demands on him, with which he was resolved not to comply. He told me that he had no wish to raise my relatives from their station in society; and that, indeed, there were only two among them whom he conceived had any claims upon me—my mother and my twin sister; that the former was incapable of any improper request, and the latter, by marrying Cooper, had fixed her own position, and could in no way be raised from the rank of her chosen husband. I agreed to much that he said. I replied that he well knew that my own taste led me to consider mediocrity the best and happiest situation; that I had no wish, and would never consent, to supply any extravagant demands on the part of persons, however dear to me, whose circumstances he had rendered easy.

Satisfied with my reply, we parted most affectionately, and I went on my way to Margate with a light and glad heart; and the cordial reception I received from my whole family collected together to receive me, was calculated to add to my satisfaction. The only drawback to my content was my mother's state: she was wasted to a shadow. They all talked and laughed around her, but it was evident to me that she had not long to live.

There was no room for me in the small furnished house in which they were all crowded, so I remained at the hotel. Early in the morning, before I was up, my father visited me. He begged me to intercede with my husband; that on the strength of his support he had embarked in a speculation which required a large capital; that many families would be ruined, and himself dishonoured, if a few hundreds were not advanced. I promised to do what I could, resolving to ask my mother's advice, and make her my guide. My father kissed me with an effusion of gratitude, and left me.

I cannot enter into the whole of these sad details; all my half-brothers and sisters had married, and trusted their success in life to Lord Reginald's assistance. Each evidently thought that they asked little in not demanding an equal share of my luxuries and fortune; but they were all in difficulty—all needed large assistance—all depended on me.

Lastly, my own sister Susan appealed to me—but hers was the most moderate request of all—she only wished for twenty pounds. I gave it her at once from my own purse.

As soon as I saw my mother I explained to her my difficulties. She told me that she expected this, and that it broke her heart: I must summon courage and resist these demands. That my father's imprudence had ruined him, and that he must encounter the evil he had brought on himself; that my numerous relatives were absolutely mad with the notion of what I ought to do for them. I listened with grief—I saw the torments in store for me—I felt my own weakness, and knew that I could not meet the rapacity of those about me with any courage or firmness. That same night my mother fell into convulsions; her life was saved with difficulty. From Susan I learned the cause of her attack. She had had a violent altercation with my father: she insisted that I should not be appealed to; while he reproached her for rendering me undutiful, and bringing ruin and disgrace on his grey hairs. When I saw my pale mother trembling, fainting, dying—when I was again and again assured that she must be my father's victim unless I yielded, what wonder that, in the agony of my distress, I wrote my husband to implore his assistance.

Oh, what thick clouds now obscured my destiny! how do I remember, with a sort of thrilling horror, the boundless sea, white cliffs, and wide sands of Margate! The summer day that had welcomed my arrival changed to bleak wintry weather during this interval—while I waited with anguish for my husband's answer. Well do I remember the evening on which it came: the waves of the sea showed their white crests, no vessel ventured to meet the gale with any canvas except a topsail, the sky was bared clear by the wind, the sun was going down fiery red. I looked upon the troubled waters—I longed to be borne away upon them, away from care and misery. At this moment a servant followed me to the sands with my husband's answer—it contained a refusal. I dared not communicate it. The menaces of bankruptcy; the knowledge that he had instilled false hopes into so many; the fears of disgrace, rendered my father, always rough, absolutely ferocious. Life flickered in my dear mother's frame, it seemed on the point of expiring when she heard my father's step; if he came in with a smooth brow, her pale lips wreathed into her own sweet smile, and a delicate pink tinged her fallen cheeks; if he scowled, and his voice was high, every limb shivered, she turned her face to the pillow, while convulsive tears shook her frame, and threatened instant dissolution. My father sought me alone one day, as I was walking in melancholy guise upon the sands; he swore that he would not survive his disgrace. "And do you think, Fanny," he added, "that your mother will survive the knowledge of my miserable end?" I saw the resolution of despair in his face as he spoke. I asked the sum needed, the time when it must be given. A thousand pounds in two days was all that was asked. I set off to London to implore my husband to give this sum.

No! no! I cannot step by step record my wretchedness—the money was given—I extorted it from Lord Reginald, though I saw his very heart closed on me as he wrote the cheque. Worse had happened since I had left him. Susan had used the twenty pounds I gave her to reach town, to throw herself at my husband's feet, and implore his compassion. Rendered absolutely insane by the idea of having a lord for a brother-in-law, Cooper had launched into a system of extravagance, incredible as it was wicked. He was many thousand pounds in debt, and when at last Lord Reginald wrote to refuse all further supply, the miserable man committed forgery. Two hundred pounds prevented exposure, and preserved him from an ignominious end. Five hundred more were advanced to send him and his wife to America, to settle there, out of the way of temptation. I parted from my dear sister—I loved her fondly; she had no part in her husband's guilt, yet she was still attached to him, and her child bound them together; they went into solitary, miserable exile. "Ah! had we remained in virtuous poverty," cried my broken-hearted sister, "I had not been forced to leave my dying mother."

The thousand pounds given to my father was but a drop of water in the ocean. Again I was appealed to; again I felt the slender thread of my mother's life depended on my getting a supply. Again, trembling and miserable, I implored the charity of my husband.

"I am content," he said, "to do what you ask, to do more than you ask; but remember the price you pay—either give up your parents and your family, whose rapacity and crimes deserve no mercy, or we part for ever. You shall have a proper allowance; you can maintain all your family on it if you please; but their names must never be mentioned to me again. Choose between us—you never see them more, or we part for ever."

Did I do right—I cannot tell—misery is the result—misery frightful, endless, unredeemed. My mother was dearer to me than all the world. I did not reply—I rushed to my room, and that night, in a delirium of grief and horror, I set out for Margate—such was my reply to my husband.

Three years have passed since then; and during all this time I was grateful to Heaven for being permitted to do my duty by my mother; and though I wept over the alienation of my husband, I did not repent. But she, my angelic support, is no more. My father survived my mother but two months; remorse for all he had done, and made me suffer, cut short his life. His family by his first wife are gathered round me; they importune, they rob, they destroy me. Last week I wrote to Lord Reginald. I communicated the death of my parents; I represented that my position was altered; and that if he still cared for his unhappy wife all might be well. Yesterday his answer came. It was too late, he said; I had myself torn asunder the ties that united us—they never could be knit together again.

By the same post came a letter from Susan. She is happy. Cooper, awakened to a manly sense of the duties of life, is thoroughly reformed. He is industrious and prosperous. Susan asks me to join her. I am resolved to go. Oh! my home, and recollections of my youth, where are ye now? envenomed by serpents' stings, I long to close my eyes on every scene I have ever viewed. Let me seek a strange land, a land where a grave will soon be opened for me. I desire to die. I am told that Lord Reginald loves another, a high-born girl; that he openly curses our union as the obstacle to his happiness. The memory of this will poison the oblivion I go to seek. He will soon be free. Soon will the hand he once so fondly took in his and made his own, which, now flung away, trembles with misery as it traces these lines, moulder in its last decay.

THOMAS HOOD

(1799–1845)

THOMAS HOOD, after a fairly competent upbringing and education, early manifested those literary tendencies that were to bring him renown both as poet and prose-writer. A friend of Lamb, Hazlitt, and De Quincey, he published, in collaboration with John Hamilton Reynolds, *Odes and Addresses to Great People*, in 1825. *Whims and Oddities* (1826–7) preceded his assumption of the editorial chair of *The Gem* in 1829. *Hood's Own* appeared in 1829, and *Up the Rhine* in 1839. Returning from a sojourn abroad, he assumed the editorship of *The New Monthly Magazine* (1841–3), in which appeared "Miss Kilmansegg." His famous "Song of the Shirt" first appeared anonymously in *Punch*. In 1844 he established *Hood's Magazine*, and issued *Whimsicalities*. In the same year he was granted a Civil List pension, which, unfortunately, he did not live long to enjoy.

"A Tale of the Great Plague" is reprinted from *Hood's Own*.

A TALE OF THE GREAT PLAGUE

This is one of the *pest* discretions.
—SIR HUGH EVANS.

ABOUT five or six years after that deplorable great Plague of London, there befell a circumstance which, as it is not set forth in Defoe in his history of the pestilence, I shall make bold to write down herein, not only on account of the strangeness of the event, but also because it carried a moral pick-a-back, as a good story ought to do.

It is a notoriously known fact, as collected from the bills of mortality, that there died of the plague in the mere metropolis a matter of some hundreds of thousands of human souls: yet notwithstanding this most awful warning to evil doers, the land did nevertheless bring forth such a rank crop of sin and wickedness, that the like was never known before or after; the city of London, especially, being overrun with bands of thieves and murtherers, against whom there was little or no check, the civical police having been utterly disbanded and disrupt during the ravages of the pestilence. Neither did men's minds turn for some time towards the mere safeguard of property, being still distracted with personal fears; for although the pest had, as it were, died of the excess of its own violence, yet from time to time there arose flying rumours of fresh breakings out of the malady. The small-pox and the malignant fever being the prolific parent of such like alarms. Accordingly many notable robberies and divers grievous murthers having been acted with impunity during the horrible crisis of the pest, those which had before been wicked were now hardened, and became a thousand times worse, till the city and the neighbourhood thereof seemed given in prey to devils, who had been loosened for a season from the everlasting fetter of the law.

Now four of these desperadoes having met together at the Dolphin in Deptford, they laid a plot together to rob a certain lone mansion house which stood betwixt the Thames marshes and the Forest of Hainault, and which was left in the charge of only one man, the family being gone off to another mansion house in the county of Wiltshire, for the sake of a more wholesome air. And the manner of the plot was this: one of the villains going in a feigned voice was to knock at the front door and beg piteously for a night's shelter, and then, the door being opened, the other knaves were to rush in and bind the serving-man, or murther him, as might seem best, and so taking his keys they were to ransack the house, where they expected to find a good store of plate. Accordingly one Friday, at the dead of the night, they set forth, having for leader a fellow that was named Blackface, by reason of a vizard which he wore always on such errands, diverting themselves by the way with laying out each man his share of the booty in the manner that pleased him best, wine and the women of Lewkener's Lane coming in, you may be sure, for the main burthen of the song. At last they entered the fore-court of the house which they were to rob, and which was as silent as death, and as dark, excepting a glimmer from one window towards the top. Blackface then, as agreed upon, began to beat at the door, but being flushed with drink, instead of entreating for an entrance, he shouted out to the serving-man, bidding him with many terrible oaths to come down and to render up his keys, for that they were come to relieve him of his charge.

"In the name of God, my masters," cried the serving-man from the window, "what do you want here?"

"We are come," returned Blackface, "to relieve you of your trust, so throw us down your keys."

"An that be all," said the serving-man, whose name was Adams, "wait but a little while and you shall have the keys and my place to boot. Come again but a few hours hence, and you shall find me dead, when you may do with me and my trust as you list."

"Come, come," cries Blackface, "no preaching, but come down and open, or we will bring fire and faggot to the door."

"Ye shall not need," answered Adams, "hearken only to what I say, and you shall have free passage; but I give you fair warning, though I be but a single man, and without weapon, and sick even unto death, yet shall your coming in cost you as many lives as ye bear amongst you, for within these walls there is a dismal giant that hath slain his thousands, even the Plague." At these dreary words the courage of the robbers was taken somewhat aback, but Blackface spirited them on, saying it was no doubt an invention to deter them from the spoil.

"Alas," answered Adams, who overheard their argument, "what I say is the solemn and sorrowful truth, and which I am speaking for the last time, for I shall never see to-morrow's blessed sun. As for the door, I will open it to you with my own hands, beseeching you for your own sakes to stand a little apart, and out of the taint of my breath, which is sure destruction. There is one child herein a dead corpse, as you shall behold if you have so much courage, for it lieth unburied in the hall." So saying he descended, and presently flung open the hall door, the villains withdrawing a little backward, and they saw verily by the light of a rush wick which he carried that he was lapt only in a white sheet, and looking very pale and ghost-like, with a most dismal black circle round each of his eyes.

"If ye disbelieve me still," he said, "look inwards when I draw back from the door, and ye shall see what was a living child this day, but is now a corpse hastening to corruption. Alas! in the midst of life we are in death: she was seized at play." With these words he drew aside, and the robbers, looking through the door, perceived it was even as he said, for the dead body of the child was lying on the hall table, with the same black ring round its eyes, and dressed in brocade and riband as though death had carried it off, even as he said, in its holiday clothes. "Now," said Adams, after they had gazed awhile, "here be the keys," therewithal passing towards them a huge bunch; but the villains would now no more meddle with them than with so many aspics or scorpions, looking on them as the very keys of death's door. Accordingly, after venting a few curses on their ill-luck, they began to depart in very ill humour, when Adams again called to them to hear his last words.

"Now," said he, "though ye came hither with robbery, and perchance murther in your hearts, against me, yet as a true Christian will I not only forgive your wicked intents, but advise you how to shun that miserable end which my own life is coming to so very suddenly. Although your souls have been saved from sins, yet doubtless ye have not stood so long in this infected air without peril to the health of your bodies, wherefore, by the advice of a dying man, go straightway from this over to Laytonstone, where there be tan pits, and sit there for a good hour amidst the strong smell of the tan, and which hath more virtue as a remedy against the infection of the Plague, than even tobacco or the odour of drugs. Do this and live, for the poison is strong and subtle, and seizeth ere one can be aware on the springs of life." Thereupon, he uttered a dismal groan, and began yelling so fearfully that the robbers with one accord took to flight, and never stopped till they were come to Laytonstone, and into the tanner's very yard, where they sat down and stooped over the pit, snuffing up the odours with all the relish of men in whose nostrils it was as the breath of life. In which posture they had been sitting half an hour, when there entered several persons with a lantern, and which they took to be the tanner and his men, and to whom, therefore, they addressed themselves, begging pardon for their boldness, and entreating leave to continue awhile in the tan-yard to disinfect themselves of the plague; but they had hardly uttered these words, when lo! each man was suddenly seized upon, and bound in a twinkling, the constables, for such they were, jeering them withal, and saying the Plague had been too busy to come itself, but had sent them a gallows and a halter instead, which would serve their turn. Whereupon most of the rogues became very chopfallen, but Blackface swore he could die easy but for one thing upon his mind, and that was, what had become of the dead child and the man dying of the plague, both of which he had seen with his own eyes. Hereupon, the man with a lantern turned the light upon his own face which the rogues knew directly to be the countenance of Adams himself, but without any of those black rings round the eyes, and for which he explained he had been indebted to a little charcoal. "As for the dead child," he said, "you must inquire, my masters, of the worshipful company of Barber Surgeons, and they will tell you of a certain waxen puppet of Hygeia, the Goddess of Health, which used to be carried at their pageants, and when it fell into disuse was purchased of them by my Lady Dame Ellinor Wood, for a plaything for her own children. So one head, you see, is worth four pair of hands, and your whole gang, tall and strong knaves though you be, have been overmatched by one old man and a doll."

G. P. R. JAMES

(1801–1860)

GEORGE PAYNE RAINSFORD JAMES was one of the most prolific of English novelists. He began his literary life as a contributor to the magazines, and in 1822 made a bid for fame with a *Life of the Black Prince*. In all he produced about a hundred books, most of which were works of fiction. His novel, *Richelieu* (1829), is as good as anything he ever wrote. He achieved a considerable popularity, and Thackeray paid him the compliment of parodying him in "Barbazure" in the series of "Punch's Prize Novelists."

"Norfolk and Hereford" is reprinted from *The Fortunes of the Colville Family*.

NORFOLK AND HEREFORD

PART I

THE woods were echoing with the music of hounds—for many a deep throat was pouring forth the fierce but melodious cry of eager pursuit, as the deer started away from the thicket and bounded over the brushwood of the more open part of the forest. Waving up and down was a sea of gentle hills and dales, with streams flowing through the valleys, and castles perched upon the summits. On the one side, where the country sloped away towards the banks of the Wye, a wide extent of wavy lines of every hue, of purple and of yellow, might be seen stretching afar till they were lost in misty nothing; whilst, on the other hand, over the tall tree-tops rose up the blue heads of some distant mountains. On a spot where this scene, so fair in itself, was rendered doubly beautiful by the effect of the sky, which, though it was full summer, was now partly overshadowed for a few instants by a broad heavy cloud, stood a young lad of some fourteen or fifteen years of age. He was dressed in a light tunic of green, bordered with a gold lace, with breeches, stockings, and boots of untanned leather. No cloak was upon his shoulders, but under his left arm hung a quiver full of arrows. In his right hand was a bow, taller than himself: and with his foot he kept down the leash which confined two tall speed hounds, which stood with arched backs and raised ears gazing along a broad road running through the midst of the forest. In the same direction the boy's eyes were also turned, and the same eager and impetuous look might be seen in the human face and in the faces of the dogs.

A moment after a large fine deer bounded across the space where the wood was low, and was crossing the road into the thicker part of the forest on the other side, when, in an instant, an arrow was laid upon the string, the bow raised, the shaft shot, and the noble beast fell over and over, with the missile piercing his side, through and through, just behind the shoulder. Close upon his track came the hounds and a large body of huntsmen; and the youth ran eagerly forward, exclaiming, with a sort of deprecatory look, "You gave me leave to shoot!"

"Yes, I did, Walter," replied one of the newcomers, turning towards him; "but you should be careful: you might have shot man or dog."

"Oh, no fear of that, noble lord," replied the boy; "I never miss my mark"; and gazing upon the prostrate carcass of the stag, still quivering with animal life, while the huntsmen flogged the dogs back from it, he said, in a musing tone, to himself, "The old man told me, I should some day shoot the highest beast in all the forests of England; and I think I have done it, and the fattest too."

"This is the fourth brought down this morning," said the gentleman who had just spoken, turning to another who accompanied him. "You see, Ralph, that we have venison in Herefordshire as well as in Norfolk."

"Ay, truly," replied the other; "and this is the tallest buck of all. 'Tis a shame to have it slain by a page's hand."

"Nay, nay," replied the first; "Walter Tyrrel is the best marksman amongst us; and the Norman bow was never better than in his hand. Some day he will do good service therewith. Envy him not his stroke, but let the foresters break the deer, for I have had enough of such work, and come along with me. I will show thee a hind which is better worth thine aim than all the harts of the forest."

"Have with you, my good lord," replied the other. And turning their horses' heads, they rode away, followed by a part of their attendants, but not all.

It had not been difficult to see that the two gentlemen who had spoken, while the rest maintained silence, were Norman nobles of a very high rank. They had all the distinctive marks of their class and their nature: the long dark hair, hanging in ringlets over their shoulders—the clean-shaven face, leaving not the slightest particle of beard that could be removed—the long tunics, apparently more fitted for a court than a hunting-field, and not only embroidered with gold round the edges, but ornamented in various parts with precious stones—and, above all, the furred rheno, or gorget, as I believe it may be called, which, rising partly round the neck, descended thence over the chest and shoulders. Both were young men in the early pride of life; and both were peculiarly handsome, especially the one who had spoken last. He was tall, graceful, powerfully made; and the features, slightly aquiline, displayed all that peculiar delicacy of outline which marked the Norman race, and often deluded the enemies opposed to it into the dangerous fancy that the spirit would be found as soft and delicate as the countenance.

As they rode along, at a slow pace, the one called the other Ralph, and the other addressed him again by the name of Roger; but when any of the attendants spoke to either, it was with lowly reverence, and with the addition of, my Lord the Earl. Sometimes, indeed, though but rarely, the first of the noblemen I have mentioned would call the other "Norfolk"; and the other would in turn address his companion as "Hereford"; but they seemed upon those intimate and brotherly terms which frequently existed between two knights of the middle ages, extending to an excess of attachment and devotion, which seems marvellous, and almost incredible, to our colder and more calculating minds. Whether a real and formal brotherhood of arms existed between them, I know not; but certainly the attachment of the one to the other was as great as if they had been born of the same mother; and yet, strange to say, Ralph de Guador, Earl of Norfolk, was but little acquainted with the family of Roger Fitz-Osborne, Earl of Hereford—had never seen his mother, and had only met his father, the celebrated favourite of William the Conqueror, on occasions of courtly ceremony or military parade. Such, however, is often the case, at least in a certain degree, at present. Though the deep and devoted attachment implied by the brotherhood of arms in those days no longer exists, yet how often is it that the young choose their dearest friends from circles far remote from that in which Heaven placed them? how rarely would father and son agree in regard to the choice of associates? and, alas! how often has the son to regret that he did not use the microscope of experience, which he was fond to fancy had deceived a parent's sight.

These two high lads rode on, chatting gaily as they went; and after a ride of about half an hour, the towers of a tall castle began to appear upon a hill, at some four or five miles' distance. Three centuries ago that castle was a picturesque ruin; now, the very foundations cannot be traced. At the time of which I write it was fresh in its first newness; no ivy had ventured to cling to its walls—the lichen and the moss had found no footing on the stone-work—and the smoke of the cottages below had hardly shadowed with grey the warm colour of the stone.

The towers were lost and seen, and seen and lost again, as the party advanced; now rising into view over the tree-tops as they ascended the hills, now disappearing amongst the leafy branches as they rode down into the valleys.

It was at the end of one of the steepest of these descents, that the young Earl of Hereford reined in his horse, and, pointing to a small house, superior to the ordinary tenement of Saxon thrall or ceorl, or of Norman serf or socman, being built of stone, and not inelegantly ornamented, he said, "There dwells one of our followers, Norfolk; and, by the glory of the Virgin, I must even pause and get a draught of wine, for I am thirsty with the chase. He will have no bad drink, I promise you, for he is choice in such things: so come, if you are thirsty—if not, ride on, and I will follow you."

"Nay, let me share the cup," answered his friend; and turning to the door, they dismounted.

"Here, come you in hither," said Hereford, opening the door.

"Maggy, Maggy, if the old man is out, give me a cup of wine."

A light step was heard running from an inner chamber, and the next moment a vision of beauty burst upon the sight of the young Earl of Norfolk, that seemed to dazzle his eyes, for he shaded them as if the sun had fallen upon them. The person who appeared before him was a girl of nineteen or twenty years of age, not very tall, though somewhat above the middle height. Every limb was turned in the most exquisite symmetry; the foot small and delicately shaped, the hand, with the fingers long rounded, and fair, except where, at the slender tip of each nature had painted them with the rosy hue of morning. Her dress was plain, and that of the lower sort of people, which displayed the person to much greater advantage than the long and flowing robes of the court. The neck, and part of the shoulders, were exposed; but no russet hue from the warm rays of the sun dimmed their ivory whiteness. Her eyes and hair were dark, but yet what could not be called black; and the sparkling brightness of the former was softened by the peculiar form of the eyelid, and the sweeping fringe of long black lashes as well on the lower as the upper lid. The rest of the features it is hardly necessary or possible to describe—suffice it that they were straight and beautiful; but the mouth, radiant with smiles, seemed, to the eye of Norfolk at least, as love's own home.

"Well, my good lord," she said, addressing Hereford in gay and familiar tones, "so you have concluded your hunting earlier than you thought."

"Even so, Maggy," answered Hereford, in the same light way. "And did you see the chase, fair lady?"

"I watched you for about an hour," answered the fair girl, "but then the wood swallowed you up, and I came down hither."

"Well, then, bring me a cup of wine, sweet one," answered Hereford, "for we are very thirsty."

"Am I to be your cup-bearer?" demanded the girl, with a gay toss of the head, glancing her eye at the same time to the handsome countenance of the Earl of Norfolk.

"Ay, and for my friend here, too," replied the other; "and be quick, Mag, for we are parched."

"Well, well," she answered, running away, laughing, "you are all tyrants."

In a moment or two she returned with a large cup, and a flagon of wine; and first, with a graceful bend of the head, she presented the goblet to the Earl of Norfolk.

"Nay, fair lady, give it to Lord Hereford," he said; and, with a smile and a blush, which rendered her fair countenance more beautiful than ever, she followed the directions she had received.

But little conversation followed; and the two young noblemen remounted their horses and went upon their way. The demeanour of one of the party at least was considerably changed by the brief pause which they had made. Hereford was as gay and lively as ever, and laughed and talked to his companion, without noticing apparently the grave and thoughtful manner which had so suddenly come upon the Earl of Norfolk, who rode on by his side, striving in vain to keep up the light and jesting tone commonly assumed amongst themselves by the conquerors of the Saxon people of England. Now he would reply with a sharp repartee; now he would join in his friend's laugh; but almost immediately he fell into thought again, and remained plunged in what seemed very deep, if not very pleasant, meditations.

After a time, his altered demeanour seemed to catch the attention of Hereford, who exclaimed in his usual joyous tone, "Why, what has come to thee, Norfolk? Thou art as dull as a crow on a dry day. Have the bright eyes of our fair Maggy struck thee dumb?"

"Not so," replied his friend, "although I will own, Hereford, I think you a very happy man to have such kind looks from such bright eyes."

Hereford laughed aloud. "Thou art in love. Thou art in love with our fair Mag," he cried. "But I am generous: I will give her to thee, if thou wilt. She is a present for a prince."

"But is she not a free woman?" asked Norfolk.

"Oh, yes, mighty free, as my ears can witness," replied the other earl. "She takes all liberty, I assure you, if I am over saucy."

Norfolk fell into thought again, for it seemed to him his friend was jesting; and no more was said upon the subject till they reached the castle, which they had seen from time to time as they went upon their way.

Some hours passed in various amusements, during which the Earl of Norfolk gradually shook off his thoughtful mood, and as the hour of supper approached, appeared light and cheerful as ever. The last meal of the day has in almost all ages, and with almost all people, been the brightest and the merriest. Ever since care came into the world, and labour was the work of daylight, it has necessarily been so. For it the two noblemen prepared with some care; for Hereford had informed his guest that they were not to sup alone, as they had dined. Friends were expected to join their party, he said, ay, and some bright ladies too.

Still the beautiful face and the bright eyes which he had seen in the morning haunted Norfolk, even till he entered the lesser hall of the castle, where the guests assembled previous to the meal. There were already ten or twelve persons present, with several pages handing silver basins and water in silver ewers, for the guests who had ridden from a distance to wash their hands before supper. At the farther end of the room—which was not one of the most spacious in the castle—Norfolk beheld the young Earl of Hereford with an elderly lady of a stately and dignified mien by his side; but, somewhat nearer, was a figure full of grace and beauty, with the face turned partly away, and only a part of the cheek and temple shown. Of faces that please and interest us, however, we mark more than even we ourselves believe; and small particulars, which we do not recollect having noticed, will often reveal to us the presence of a friend, long before we fully see the well-known countenance. There was something in the soft shading of the eyebrow, where it lost itself in the pure white of the temple, in the graceful line of the damask cheek, and the beautiful symmetry of the neck, which sent a thrill of pleasure through the breast of Norfolk; though he could hardly believe that, in the richly apparelled lady before him, he beheld the gay girl whom he had seen at the vassal's house. He gazed at her eagerly, and then turned his look for an instant to Hereford. The eyes of his friend were fixed upon him with a gay and laughing expression; and the next instant the lady herself turned, and there was no longer any doubt. A smile, light and playful, came upon her face when she beheld the Earl of Norfolk; but, at that moment, Hereford himself crossed towards them, and taking Norfolk by the hand, led him towards the fair stranger, saying, "Let me present you to my sister. Margaret, who lives during my father's absence with my aunt, the Countess of Breteuil, has kindly come over five miles to grace our supper"; and he then added, in a lower voice, "in a different guise from that in which she stole away this morning to witness the hunting."

Right joyous felt the heart of the Earl of Norfolk when he remembered the words of his friend in the morning. "I will give her to thee if thou wilt," he had said; but then came a little trepidation; for there was something in that high and lofty brow, something in that bright and sparkling eye, which, though softened and shaded by a look of feminine gentleness, told him that she was not one to be given, altogether without her own consent; for, even in that age, the convent was almost always a resource against an unwished-for union. He approached, however, though with some agitation; but the kind smile, and the well pleased look, gave him back his confidence: and, when she laughed gaily over their meeting in the morning, and his unconsciousness of her rank and station, he soon became again, what he usually appeared, one of the most graceful and distinguished of the Norman barons.

I will not pause upon the progress of their love, nor detail all the little incidents, full of interest to them, which occurred to strengthen and encourage it during the space of more than six weeks which Norfolk passed with the Earl of Hereford. The Countess of Breteuil looked favourably upon the whole; for there was no alliance in the land superior to that of Norfolk. Her gates were always open to the earl; and he had more opportunities than were usually afforded before marriage, of knowing and being known, loving and winning love. He thought he had won it too; and Hereford assured him that it was so: but there was something that still restrained him; and, ere he could permit his friend to write for the consent of his father and the king, he said, "I must hear, from her own lips, that she can be mine with her whole heart."

It was easily arranged that he should have the opportunity of satisfying himself; and, one bright morning of a warm summer's day, he stood by Margaret's side, in a little tapestried room, where before their eyes, beyond the open windows, spread the bright gleaming scenes of nature, and round about hung representations of shady groves, and deer feeding by the side of streams, and hunter-boys peeping forth, with bow in hand and quiver upon shoulder.

The tapestry made a rustling sound as the Countess of Breteuil departed; and Margaret, as she looked round, and found herself alone with Norfolk, became somewhat pale, and turned her eyes towards the ground. She felt that the moment of destiny had arrived; that the weal or woe of life was upon the wings of that hour.

Norfolk lost no time. His words were low, but clear and distinct, full of thrilling passion and devoted love. But Margaret still remained pale till he had done. Then she raised her eyes to his face; and, with strong command over herself, to keep her limbs from trembling, she said, "Norfolk, I know you love me. I have seen it, felt it—and I will not deny that I love you; but I will not promise you my hand till I know *how* you love me. I have seen many a scene of wedded life, which rather than endure, I would shut myself in a convent for ever. Tell me then, tell me, if I become your wife, what am I to become? How are we to live together?"

Norfolk put his hand to his brow, for a moment puzzled by her question; but, the next instant, her meaning flashed upon him, and, with a glad smile, he looked up, and took her hand in his.

"Margaret," he said, "if you do love me, you are mine; for your nature is most noble, and the answer which my heart will give to yours, must satisfy it. If you become my wife, it is not to be the plaything of an hour, a child's toy, cast aside in every moment of weariness or caprice; but it is to be the friend, the companion, the sharer of all my thoughts. It is to be my consolation in adversity, my joy in prosperity, the leading star of all my efforts, the light of all my hopes. This is what you must wish to be, with the man whom you love; and that is what you shall be, I promise you, as noble, knight, and Christian."

Promises are very vain things, and Margaret knew it; but yet, with that answer she was fully satisfied, for it showed her that Norfolk was what she had thought him, and that he was one who could understand her, and could love as she wished to be loved. She felt that he did love her too; and she resolved that he should never have occasion to forget the attachment, which beauty might have first awakened, but higher qualities had confirmed.

Their mutual promise was given; and Hereford joyfully heard that his friend and his sister were pledged to each other. Two couriers were at once sent off—the one to London, to ask the consent of the renowned Fitz-Osborne, the lady's father; the other to Normandy, to crave the king's approbation of the marriage; for in those days, the noble, in his marriage, was as much a thrall as his own serf: and, while waiting for answers, the whole party remained enjoying all the brightest things of life—Love, Friendship, and Hope.

PART II

OH, fitful Fortune! The return of the first messenger brought confirmation of their expectations. Fitz-Osborne gladly accepted the alliance of the Earl of Norfolk; and, as he was about to sail at once for Normandy on business that could not be delayed, he furnished his son with full powers to conclude the marriage of Margaret and his friend.

The messenger who had been dispatched to William, however, was longer absent. True, the distance was greater—true, the uncertain seas had to be crossed; but still the delay was longer than could be well accounted for; and both Norfolk and Hereford began to ask themselves if William could hesitate. If he should refuse his consent, what then? The very thought well-nigh drove Norfolk mad. To lose his bright and beautiful bride, to see her bestowed upon another, would be worse than death, he thought; and long and earnest were his consultations with Hereford, as day passed by on day, and yet no answer came. They now began, as man ever does when hope gives place to apprehension, to calculate chances against them which they had previously overlooked. They commented freely on William's character; they knew it to be cold, calculating, and cruel. They recapitulated to each other his failings and his faults: they asked themselves, what right he had to lord it so sternly over Norman nobles, to whose swords he owed a crown—he, the son of the tanner's daughter, how came he to have at his disposal the race of Fitz-Osborne? Even his oppression of the Saxons was remembered and spoken of. The two nobles had always pitied them. The famous Waltheof—the greatest man remaining of the Saxon tribes, whose courage, skill, and virtues had raised him so high even in the opinion of the Conqueror, that William had bestowed his niece upon him in marriage—was the intimate friend and companion of both Hereford and Norfolk; and they now expressed to one another their wonder that a leader so well fitted by his powers of mind, by his popularity with his nation, by his military skill, and his indomitable resolution, should have refrained from again raising the Saxon standard against the Norman duke, and waging a war of extermination upon the oppressors of his people.

"It is his religious scruples," said Norfolk. "He has profound reverence for the sanctity of an oath; and you must remember that, when forced to surrender York, he swore never again to wage war against the Norman race."

"Were those the exact terms of his oath?" asked Hereford.

"I believe so," replied Norfolk.

"What would be his conduct, think you, if he saw the Normans divided amongst themselves?" Hereford inquired.

"Ay, that would be a different question," answered Norfolk. "Heaven grant that the time may be far distant!"

"Men cannot be expected to submit to tyranny," replied the young Earl of Hereford; and there the conversation dropped: but it was the germ of the most dangerous conspiracy that ever shook the throne of the Norman conqueror.

Three days more passed; and at length the messenger returned. It was to Hereford the letter was addressed; and it was brought to him by his favourite page, young Walter Tyrrel.

"Stay," he said to the boy, while he opened it; "stay in the room." With an eager look he broke the seals of the packet, and with an angry expression of countenance he read the contents. It was a cold refusal to consent to the marriage of Margaret and Norfolk; and, going to the door, he called aloud upon his friend's name, who was speedily by his side.

"There, read that," said Hereford, "read that; and then let us consult what is to be done."

The wrath of the lover may be well conceived; but it was even less than the anger of his young and impetuous friend; for Norfolk's rage was mingled with grief and a feeling akin to despair, while Hereford's was the fiery offspring of wounded pride. Rash, vehement, and fierce were the words spoken; and, with a terrible oath, Hereford swore that his sister should still be the bride of his friend, let all the bastards in Normandy say nay.

"Let us go and see Margaret," he exclaimed. "She will not refuse her consent where she loves. Once married, you cannot be unmarried; and if William dare to threaten aught against us, he may be taught that to our swords he owes his elevation to the throne, and that upon our swords depends his possession of the crown. He cannot trample upon the Norman nobles as he did upon the Saxon churls; and methinks if Norfolk and Hereford give their banners to the winds in their own defence, thousands both of Normans and Saxons will join them, if they have any desire to preserve even a vestige of their rights and liberties."

Thus saying, he turned towards the door to seek his sister Margaret, when his eyes rested upon the boy, Walter Tyrrel. "Ha, lad," he said, "I forgot that I had bid thee wait; but thou art trustworthy I know, and would never betray thy lord's secrets."

"Not to the priest in the confessional, my lord," replied the lad; and, as he followed the two earls from the room, he murmured to himself, "Were I one of them, I would not wait to unfurl my banner till it was in my own defence: I would strike ere I was stricken; but they know best, I suppose."

"Well, what news—what news?" cried the old Countess of Breteuil, who was sitting with Margaret when the two young lords entered. "What news from Normandy?"

Margaret asked no questions; but her eyes fixed upon the face of her brother, and she read there plainly enough the answer which had been received from William. The tale was soon told, and Margaret's warm cheek grew pale.

"Out upon the unthankful hound!" exclaimed the old countess. "What will you now do, my children? Think not to move him by prayers and entreaties. I know him well. He is as hard as one of the stones of this castle; harder still—for it you may hew and fashion, but him you cannot. What will you do, I say?"

"Go forward, as if his consent had never been asked," answered Hereford.

"But there is one consent we must have," said Norfolk; and, advancing to Margaret, he took her hand and kissed it. "Sweet lady," he said, "if I lose you, I lose more than life; and therefore, whatever may be the result to myself, I gain more than I can lose if you will be mine: but remember, Margaret, ere you answer me in words—for I read the answer already in those dear eyes—that, if you consent to what we propose, you may have to share in dangers, troubles, cares, reverses—many kinds of grief. Have you the heart to bear them?"

"I will keep my promise, Norfolk," replied Margaret, with a look full of affection. "What you are ready to risk for me, surely I ought to be ready to share with you. Nor will I ever regret, even though a tyrant should cast us into dungeons, and separate us from each other; I should still know, and feel joy in knowing, that I had kept my promise, and redeemed my word to the man I love."

"He will have difficulty in caging us," answered her brother.

"He may mew a hawk, but not an eagle; and he shall find that I was not born to strike his prey for him and then have my wings clipped, lest I should soar beyond his call."

So was it determined; but both the young lords knew that their course was perilous, and that the only chance—if indeed there were a chance—of inducing William to bear their disobedience patiently, was to show so formidable a front as to render it dangerous to assail them. This was all that was proposed at first; and they bestirred themselves to gather together friends from every side, and to form alliances with the other great nobles of the land—not for the purpose, at least so they expressed themselves, of waging war against the crown, but merely to be ready to guard their own rights if they should be assailed. It was especially an object to gain the celebrated Waltheof, the famous defender of York—the last, the most noble, and the wisest of all the Saxon thanes, the only one for whom William had shown any admiration and regard.

"Leave him to me," said Hereford; "there is great friendship between us; and I will bring him over, notwithstanding his marriage with, and devotion to, that base faithless wench, Judith, William's niece. We must take him by surprise, however, nor let him know anything of our design till it be complete. He feels the wrongs of his people, although he bears them; and he will soon be led on to snatch at the first feasible scheme for avenging them."

"Were it not better to open his eyes to Judith's conduct?" asked Norfolk. "By so doing we should destroy her influence. And it has often grieved me to see so noble and so good a man thus basely deceived by his false wife."

"No, no," answered Hereford, with a laugh; "he would not believe me. He is a lover, my good friend; and lovers never believe. But hie thee away to thine own country, and prepare everything for the joyful day. I, and my good aunt, and Margaret, will join thee with all speed; and I will give thee her hand, let who will forbid."

PART III

The chapel of the castle of Inningham or Ixningeham, not far from Newmarket, was crowded with nobles of the land. Ladies and lords from every part of England were present to honour the marriage of Ralph de Guador, Earl of Norfolk, with Margaret, the lovely daughter of the house of Hereford. There was but one Saxon present: but tall above the rest, almost gigantic in stature, and with unrivalled dignity of grace and mien, towered Waltheof, the last of the great Saxon chiefs. The words, the irrevocable words were spoken; the blush with which she had uttered them was still on Margaret's cheek; the joyful light of love with which Norfolk had pronounced the vow was beaming in his eyes; and the benediction of the priest was given. He took her by the hand, now his wife, and led her from the altar to the great hall, where the marriage-feast had been prepared. Lords and ladies sat down together; and mirth and revelry reigned around. Every delicacy that France or England could produce was placed upon the board; and the richest wines of Gascony and Poitou flowed in abundance round. After a short time the ladies rose, and left the table, gathering round the bride; but, with the men who were left, the revel proceeded for many an hour. Some drank deep, and some drank little; but the stream of conversation flowed more rapidly as the wine circulated. Men's spirits rose; hopes and expectations that were dim grew bright; indignation at wrongs and oppression became keen and found a tongue; difficulties and dangers were forgotten, and obstacles were overlooked; till, at length, Hereford rising with a jewelled cup in his hand, lifted it on high, and exclaimed, "Death to all tyrants!"

He drank down the wine, and resumed his seat; but there was not one man there present who, in the excitement of the moment, did not follow his example, and, "Death to all tyrants!" ran round and round the table.

Before another cup was filled, Norfolk was gone; but the words which had been spoken were like a spark to a mass of dry branches. Eagerly and fiercely, abuse was poured upon the absent monarch; each noble had something to complain of; and, under the influence of wine, each grief was told and exaggerated. Hard words and coarse were applied to the Conqueror; and determinations were formed in a state of excitement, which cooler thoughts would have shown to be rash or impracticable. One only remained silent—Waltheof the Saxon: and to him Hereford's eyes were often turned with doubt and anxiety. It was not alone that the great Saxon noble combined in his own person the earldoms of Huntingdon, Northampton, and Northumberland, but it was because he was universally recognised as the leader and representative of the Saxon people of England. He sat silent; but Hereford remarked that, according to the evil custom of his nation, he drank deep—deeper than any other there present; and when the young earl saw the wine had taken some effect, he pressed the subject on him.

"My lord," said Waltheof aloud, "I owe William, Duke of Normandy, much. He spared my life when I was his prisoner; he has loaded me with honours and benefits, when he knew me to be an enemy; and he has trusted no other of my race. You cannot expect me to raise my hand against one who has taken these means of converting an adversary into a friend."

"Well, noble lord," replied Hereford, "each man must judge for himself; and we Normans hold that two men, as you and I, may be good friends at the festal board one day, though they know they may have to meet in arms the next. Pledge me a loving cup to my sweet sister's health. Here, lords and gentlemen, is to Margaret, Countess of Norfolk. Joy be with her and her noble lord."

Waltheof filled his golden cup to the brim, and drained it to the dregs; but Hereford, more prudently, after having tasted his, set it down by his side; and then, as he saw the wine working its effect on Waltheof's brain, he plied him hard with many an argument, to prove that it was the duty of a Saxon nobleman to cast all personal considerations aside, and to aim boldly at the deliverance of his countrymen. He represented to him that both the Saxons and the Normans stood as conquerors of England, and that they might very well, when they had freed themselves from the tyranny of William and his favourites, live amicably together as a united people, dividing the lands by fair and equal portions amongst them. He represented in strong and glowing language all the evils which William had inflicted upon the Saxon race, and all the wrongs he had done them. His grinding oppression, his overwhelming taxation, his barbarous spoliation of a peaceful and submissive people, he dwelt upon: he represented that he had excited rebellions merely for the purpose of suppressing them, and making them a pretext for confiscation, if not extermination. He painted a terrible picture too of the cruelties which the Conqueror had perpetrated, of the executions, the massacres, the mutilations which he had commanded, till Waltheof's blood began to boil at this recapitulation of the wrongs of his people; and he, too, uttered rash and ill-considered words, which seemed to pledge him to the conspiracy.

At length, the young earl rose, saying, "Now, noble lords, we are all agreed that this can be borne no longer. Let each man hasten to make his preparation against danger; and, when the time comes, each shall hear from me where we will meet in arms. From that moment, we must throw from us every consideration but one—that of how we may best secure the liberties and the rights of all."

The party broke up; and each man wended homeward on his way with vague and ill-defined visions of greatness, and freedom, and revenge. Even Waltheof pondered, with a sort of gloomy joy, the hopes of emancipation held out to his people.

But such dreams lasted not long with him; and on the following morning he woke, languid, heated, dejected, with the consciousness of having given at least a tacit approval to a conspiracy that was hopeless against a man to whom he was deeply indebted. His heart smote him, and the more because he felt an intimate conviction that no peril on his part could produce any beneficial effect to his people, but that every forward step, in the course which had been set before him, would only tend to bring down further oppression and persecution on their heads. In this mood he rode forth, dark, gloomy, repentant; and the more he thought, the more sad his heart became.

Fair, and false, and faithless, the Countess of Huntingdon was seated in her chamber when her husband returned to his dwelling; and as soon as he approached her, she employed all her arts, and they were many, to wring from him the secret of the gloom which she very well perceived. At first she did so somewhat timidly, fancying that Waltheof might have discovered her infidelity; but his tenderness soon banished that apprehension, and she went on more boldly. By persuasions, by entreaties, by caresses, even by tears, she succeeded at length in bending him to her will. He told her all; and then added, "But I repent that I even listened so far; and I will take care to frustrate this plot against the king, if I can but discover how I may prevent it without incurring the charge of faithlessness. Would to Heaven I could have some good advice! but I can consult no one but thee, dear lady, without betraying my noble friends."

Judith would give him no counsel. It was not her object to do so; and Waltheof left her to meditate over his future conduct alone. At nightfall, however, a messenger, bearing a sealed packet, left the dwelling of the Saxon secretly, and stopped not night or day till he had reached Normandy, and presented himself at the court of the

Conqueror. He would give the packet into the hand of none but William himself; and as he did so, he said, "From your niece, the lady Judith, mighty prince."

William opened it, and read; and a flush passed across his brow, as if a flame had shone upon it.

A day or two after, Lanfranc, Archbishop of Canterbury, was seated in his large chair in his own private oratory. Beside him kneeled the noble form of the Earl of Huntingdon; and the eyes of the prelate rested upon him with an expression of tender pity and affection.

"Your secret, my son," he said, "is safe under the seal of confession; and, some time soon, I will appoint you such penance as the Church is accustomed to require. But, in the meantime, if you will take the advice of a mere mortal friend, as well as the counsel of a spiritual father, you will, without an instant's delay, hasten hence to Normandy, cast yourself at the king's feet, and entreat him to pardon your fault, making atonement by a full confession of the whole."

Waltheof rose from his knees; and giving the prelate his hand, he said, "Father, I will obey you to the letter. I feel that it is the only atonement I can make; and if it lead me to the block, I will make it."

Within five days from that time he was at the feet of William; and the whole tale was told. The monarch showed neither surprise nor anger, but raised the earl with his own hand, and said, "My lord, you have done well. I will take instant order that this empty plot of some idle boys shall be frustrated. In the meantime, you must, I fear, remain in some sort a prisoner, though in no very strict confinement. William of Morteville, we give him into your ward. Be answerable for him with your head."

PART IV

UNDER the shade of an old oak, on whose wide and rugged arms, which in their young freshness had probably stretched over the mysterious rites of the Druids, still grew their holy mistletoe, were seated Ralph de Guador and his fair Margaret. His arm was round her waist; her hand was clasped in his; her head leaned upon his shoulder; all sterner thoughts were laid aside; it was the hour of tenderness and love. They thought not of strife and battle; they thought not of difficulty and danger; they only thought that in spite of all they were each other's, and that nought but death could dissolve the bond between them. The honeymoon was half run out; but yet not a drop of its sweetness seemed exhausted. Nought of bitter had risen up in the fountain of their love; and Margaret felt that she was more happy than even the dear voice of hope had promised.

From the foot of the oak descended a gentle hill; and from the foot of the hill stretched away a glade, beyond which, and a low copse that cut it at the end of about half a mile, were seen rising the tall towers of Framlingham.

What Ralph de Guador said, and what Margaret answered, matters not much here. The words of love—of happy love—vary them how you will, are almost always common-place. All precious things are simple. The diamond is all of one nature.

But presently a figure was seen to emerge from behind the coppice, and ride rapidly up the glade. "Who can that be?" said Margaret. "It is none of our own people"; and she dwelt with pleasure on the words, "our own."

"It seems a boy or a dwarf," said her husband; and then as the horseman came nearer, he exclaimed, "Young Walter Tyrrel, on my life! news from your noble brother, dearest Margaret. God send that they be good!"

A slight flush crossed his cheek as he spoke; for the Earl of Norfolk recollected the perils in which he and his friends stood, and thought with some feeling of shame that, lying in the silken nap of love, he had forgotten the sterner business of the hour, or at best had not given it that attention which it needed.

"My noble lord," said young Walter Tyrrel, springing to the ground and approaching, "I am sent by my great master, the Earl of Hereford, to warn you that Waltheof, the Saxon Earl of Huntingdon and Northumberland, has gone to carry his own head to King William, who will doubtless take the offering; and my noble lord further says that no time is to be lost, but preparation must be made immediately. He does entreat you, therefore, to raise all the force you can, and to provide your castles for a war. He will advance upon Shrewsbury, if you will come in the same direction as soon as your levies are in the field. You can meet, he thinks, midway between this and Herefordshire, perhaps near Coventry. But he begs you particularly to secure and fortify one of your ports for the auxiliaries to land, for whom he has sent to Denmark."

The boy delivered his message with graceful freedom; and Norfolk, starting up from the ground, exclaimed, "I have been remiss. I have been very much remiss. But I will make up for lost time; and now I will show what deeds I can do for your love, my lady dear. Back to the castle, Walter, as fast as your horse can go, and bid them have twelve horses saddled, twelve messengers ready to depart instantly."

The boy sprang on his horse's back, and darted away like an arrow from a bow. Norfolk drew Margaret's arm through his own, and led her on towards Framlingham, saying, "Days so bright, dear girl, are in our cloudy climate ever followed by a storm; and now, perchance, when you find the tempest howling around us, you may regret you listened to Norfolk's suit, and wedded him against a tyrant's will."

"Never, my knight," answered Margaret. "If I know my own nature, I was born to be the bride of such as thee. With my own hands I will buckle on thy spurs; I will hang the shield about thy neck, dear Ralph; I will send thee to the battle with a tear and a prayer; but I will not set me idly down and weep when thou art gone. Thy spirit shall be with Margaret in thine absence; and I'll move thy rich earldom from end to end to strengthen thy power against the tyrant's force. I'll ask mothers for their sons, wives for their husbands, to swell the ranks of my noble lord, and diligently and busily will I prepare, that, in case of reverse, you may have strength to fall back upon. Oh, that I could don the hauberk, too, and ride to the field by the side of him I love! But what woman can do, will I do; and thou shalt never in thy life have cause to regret that thou didst peril all for the love of Margaret of Breteuil."

The instant they reached the castle, twelve letters were written and dispatched by the messengers. Each contained but six words, "To arms at Framlingham, for Norfolk"; and by the end of the second day, a gallant force of many hundred spears, and a large band of archers, were ready at the castle for the march. During those two days numerous other messengers had been dispatched to more distant places. The letters which they bore contained more detailed directions and commands to the vavasors and tenants of the earl. His line of march was pointed out, the halting places named; and to all, strict charge was given to make no delay, but to join him on the march.

Messengers, however, arrived as well as departed; but the news they brought was anything but pleasant to the ear. Odo, Bishop of Bayeux, the Conqueror's brother, and Regent of the kingdom, so the tidings ran, was already in the field with a large force; while the Bishop of Worcester, the Abbot of Avesham, and the Sheriff of Worcestershire, at the head of a powerful army, were marching to oppose the Earl of Hereford, wherever he might attempt to cross the Severn.

This intelligence took Norfolk by surprise; for the treacherous diligence of Judith, anxious to destroy her husband, was not known for many an after year; and no one could divine how the Regent and the other officers of the crown could be so suddenly prepared to oppose the insurrection.

Nothing daunted, however, the bridegroom parted from his bride, and, at the head of about five thousand men, commenced his march. Margaret, for her part, would add no weight to the pain which pressed upon his heart. She was calm, though grave; and though, at the last embrace, a glittering drop swam for a moment in her eyes, she would not suffer it to run over, but crushed it between the long eyelashes as it trembled on the lids. With streaming banners, and trumpets sounding, the young earl marched on; and from time to time his scouts brought back intelligence of what was passing in the country around. They thought the news was joyful when they carried the tidings that no force was in sight, and the country profoundly quiet. Nor did the countenance of Norfolk undeceive them, though the tale was not that which he wished to hear. He had expected that risings would take place in every part of England, that the Saxon people would start up and make some effort to break their chains, that the lesser Norman barons would take the first opportunity of resisting, armed, a haughty rule which galled their proud spirits. He knew not how tamely a nation can bear oppression to a certain point. All was still.

At length, on the morning of the fourth day's march, a scout came in, in breathless haste, to tell, that just three miles in advance, a large body of men, which he calculated at ten thousand, was coming rapidly forward.

"Then we will fight them," said Norfolk boldly. "Our good cause more than doubles our numbers"; and he marched on. But ere he had gone half a mile, news was brought that a considerable force was seen upon his right; and from the left, too, tidings came of large bodies of light horse scouring the flat country on the side of Cambridge.

The prospect was not pleasant, certainly. To fall back seemed impossible; and yet the odds were somewhat fearful. Norfolk thought of Margaret; but that thought did not sink his heart, or oppress his energies. "I will do great deeds for her love," he said; "then, if I live or die, she will love me still"; and, advancing a little, till he reached a slightly rising ground which he had seen before him, he took possession of the summit, and made the best preparations he could against the attack of a superior force. Calling the inferior barons and leaders around him, in a few brief words he told them that they must now each man prepare to do his best, and make valour supply the place of numbers.

"We have seen battles won," he said, "against much greater disparity than is here. Remember, where there is the more risk there is the more glory, and that one battle gained in such circumstances is more than ten victories with a superior force."

His final dispositions were hardly complete when he saw the lines of the light troops begin to appear, the *Genetaires* of a Norman army; and then, with banner and flag and pennon displayed, came on the overwhelming force of the Regent. The hearts of some of Norfolk's followers sank when they saw the long array of spears, and the green masses of the bowmen, deploying in line, and far overlapping the wings of their own little force on either side. Still they did not attempt to fly, and bore the first brunt of the battle bravely; but, at length, after a fierce and fiery struggle of at least an hour's duration, a body of the Regent's horse contrived to break through a thick hedge which defended Norfolk's archers on the left, and poured suddenly in amongst them. A panic seized the men; and, recoiling in broken masses on their own cavalry, they first carried confusion into the other ranks, and then fled amain, communicating their own terror as they went. In vain Norfolk strove to rally them on, to restore order amongst his cavalry. In vain he exposed himself to every danger. In vain he gathered together a body of two hundred of his stoutest men-at-arms, and endeavoured to stem the progress of the enemy, while others attempted to restore order in the rear. The disarray and terror were too great and too general to be remedied; and the only choice left for him was to remain and become a captive, or to make an energetic effort for escape. Three words explained his meaning to those around him; and marking out a part of the enemy's line, which seemed the weakest, on the left, the small body of about two hundred men, with levelled lances, made a furious dash at that point, broke through the opposing force, and issued forth into the fields and meadows. Orders for pursuit were given at once; and for twenty miles the chase was followed; but, by that time, the pursuers had become few in number; and Norfolk, wheeling his small force, met them in full career, and drove them back with loss.

From time to time he was rejoined by a fugitive from his own force; and from them he learned, that they had been turned from the direct way to Framlingham by the appearance of some large parties of the royal troops between them and the castle; and it became instantly necesssary to decide what was to be done, as the whole forces of the earl were directing their flight towards Framlingham.

"I will cut my way through, or perish," said the young earl, thinking of Margaret; but one of the barons who came from the borders of Norfolk and Suffolk, judging rightly the cause of his lord's desire to force his way into Framlingham, suggested another course.

"To Norwich, to Norwich, my lord," he said. "There were several thousands collected in the neighbourhood, well-nigh ready to march when I came away. I could not wait for them; but you will find them all in arms. Others from the field we have unfortunately lost will come in every hour, while the enemy's force will diminish; and I will stake my life that, within four-and-twenty hours, you will be able to march to the relief of Framlingham, should it be attacked. At present you would but lose your own life and your lady too. What can two hundred men do against a host?"

The counsel seemed wise. Indeed, it pointed out the only course which promised success. It was attended, however, with a result which Norfolk himself did not anticipate. He rode all night; and, early on the following morning, Norwich, then comparatively a small town, with the battlements of the castle rising on the hill above, was before his eyes. He looked up, and saw that the walls were covered with men; and that banners were displayed which he knew right well. The gates, too, were thronged with people, some going in, some coming out, and all in arms.

"Ay, this looks well," he said; and onward he spurred his jaded horse till it was under the gateway of the barbican. Then—oh, what joy and peace to his heart! There, on the drawbridge beyond, stood Margaret herself, no longer surrounded by women, but in the midst of armed men and captains.

She sprang to meet him, with all a woman's love in her bright eyes. "Welcome, welcome, my dear lord!" she cried. "I sent out men to warn you to keep from Framlingham, at the first news of your disaster, which reached me from an uncertain source at midnight. Have they met with you? But that matters not. You are here, and safe from this bloody fray. And now forgive your Margaret for playing the earl in your absence. I learned that there were many more assembled here, not knowing when to march or where; and I came hither with all speed with the small guard you left me. Doubting that you might be outnumbered in the field, and finding the castle unprepared for resistance, I have gathered together stores, and ammunitions, and men; and Norwich Castle can stand out a siege as long as Troy, or at least till my dear brother Hereford comes to relieve it. You forgive me, do you not, for taking such command upon me?"

"And thank thee deeply, dearest," answered Norfolk, embracing her tenderly. "Here, in my good castle of Norwich, methinks I can well set the tyrant at defiance till the people of the land wake from their long trance."

"Let us come in," said Margaret, gravely. "You are hungry, and must have food; you are weary, and must have rest. See to these good lords and nobles, seneschal. The earl will break his fast in his lady's bower."

Her look was firm and confident; her heart seemed resolved and high; but when she was alone with him she loved, she cast herself upon his breast and wept.

"Nay, Margaret," he said, pressing her in his steel-covered arms, "do not grieve, dear girl. Norfolk has lost a battle, but no honour. Fighting against four times his number, he has failed; but what man could do, he has done."

"'Tis not for that I grieve," said Margaret; "but I have news to tell that strike at the root of hope. The instant that the tidings of this disaster came, terror spread amongst the cowards here assembled. Five hundred have left the castle since midnight. Others are taking their resolution more slowly; but they are dropping off one by one."

"We shall still have enough of brave men left," answered the earl.

"I brought two hundred with me who will hold out to the last. There must be more of the same nature in the castle; and with them will I keep these walls till the forces of Hereford——"

Margaret shook her head with a melancholy look. "Hereford has no forces," she said. "They are all dispersed.—Hush! they are bringing in the meal."

It was a very melancholy one; but Norfolk's resolution was soon taken. Shortly after noon, he assembled the whole forces within the place, in the great court of the castle; and, standing on the steps of the donjon, he addressed them in a loud clear voice:

"My friends and fellow-soldiers," he said, "reverses have befallen our arms—reverses produced by the fears of a small number amongst us spreading confusion and disarray amongst the rest. In a few hours the troops of the Regent will be beneath these walls. I would not have any one stay who may bring doubt and hesitation into our councils. Let every man who fears to remain, take his departure at once; but there are those who, like myself, have no chance of pardon or peace from that oppressive lord whom our swords helped to raise to the throne, and who now repays us with ingratitude and wrong. Their only chance is to remain within these walls, and, by a gallant defence, to gain terms of peace from our enemy. He is unjust and tyrannical; but he will not break a sworn capitulation with brave men. Nevertheless, I ask no one to remain. Let everyone go, and go at once, who pleases."

The defection was terrible. Within two hours, each man had shown himself in his true colours; and between three and four hundred were all that remained to defend the castle against the forces of the Regent. Nor were those forces long in appearing; for, just as the sun was setting in his glory, dark lines of lances and armed men appeared against the glowing sky, and ere the next morning dawned, the castle was invested.

Margaret and Norfolk stood on the battlements of the keep, and gazed around them. It was a sight to make the heart sink indeed. There lay, on one side, the fair town of Norwich, spread out beneath their feet on the banks of the Yare; and there, hemming them in, appeared the camp of Odo of Bayeux, with the army drawn up in front of the tents, ready to advance to the assault. Margaret's heart did sink; but it was with fears for him she loved.

Before the attack commenced, however, a herald came forward from the bishop's tent, and summoned the place to surrender, proclaiming aloud that Odo, Regent of the Realm, was ready to grant good terms to everyone but the traitor Earl of Norfolk.

The reply was to warn the herald back, lest he should be shot at from the walls, for endeavouring to seduce the vassals from their duty to their lord.

Then the attack commenced; and wild and terrible was the scene. Large blocks of stone were hurled with tremendous force against the walls, the flights of arrows darkened the sky; ladders were raised; and the instruments of siege, as in that day practised, were pushed closer and closer to the ditch.

Margaret sat alone and prayed, while Norfolk, incessant in exertion, and in the front of every danger, animated his men to fight, and succeeded in repelling every effort of the enemy. Night fell; and no progress had been made against the castle. The troops of the Regent withdrew to their camp; but again, as the sun set, a herald appeared, and offered once more good terms to all who would submit, except Ralph de Guador, the arch traitor.

Norfolk, at that moment, stood upon one of the towers of the barbican; and, raising his voice, he demanded, "What does the bishop offer to Ralph de Guador himself, if he should surrender the castle into his hands?"

"Death, on the edge of the ditch, by the headsman's axe!" replied the herald, and withdrew.

PART V

Another day's hard fighting had passed over, and still the enemy had made no progress. The strong walls resisted every effort. The garrison repelled every assault. The troops of the Bishop of Bayeux had retired to their tents; and those soldiers of Norfolk, who during the day of strife had reposed on the unassailed side of the castle, now manned the parts which had been so gallantly defended for those twelve long hours of daylight.

Wearied and exhausted, with his casque thrown aside, and the hood of chain-mail cast back, Norfolk lay upon the floor of Margaret's small cabinet, with his head resting on her knee, and her fair fingers twined fondly in the curls of his deep black hair. She bent her head over him; and, though the tears glistened in her eyes, yet she spoke words of hope and comfort.

"Those who grasp too earnestly at happiness, dear Ralph," she said, "must ever undergo a period of ruth. The eager bargainers with destiny ever purchase dear the good they covet; but still, when the price is paid, they have it: and methinks much more will not be exacted at our hands. God is merciful; and even out of the dark evils which have befallen us, I feel as if there was a light springing up."

"Alas, alas," answered Norfolk with a sigh, "all is darkness to me! I have brought sorrow and destruction on you, my beloved, and that through your love for me. Hark! there are heavy steps in the gallery. What may that mean?" and he raised himself upon his elbow.

The next instant there was a tap at the door; and Norfolk exclaimed, "Come in."

The door opened; and, to his surprise, he beheld Brian Fitz-Hugh, one of his principal leaders and friends, followed by eight or ten of the most faithful of his captains.

A sensation of dread that he was about to be forsaken by those whom he most trusted, passed through his breast, and that of Margaret too; and, raising himself at once, he stood with his arms crossed upon his breast, gazing in surprise at his unexpected visitors. The lady bent her beautiful face upon her hands, but uttered no word; and after a momentary silence Fitz-Hugh addressed the earl in a firm but somewhat melancholy tone.

"My lord," he said, "my noble lord, we cannot hold out this castle long. The men are becoming exhausted with fatigue; and though perhaps we may resist for three days longer, yet, by the end of the third, these walls will be in possession of the enemy. I have taken counsel with your best friends, here present; each man is ready to die for you——"

"And I am ready to die for them, if it be necessary," answered Norfolk. "Remember, Brian, my noble friend, it was you yourself who bade the herald back; it was you yourself who swore last night that you would not purchase pardon and oblivion by the necessary sacrifice of your friend. I told you then I was ready; I tell you I am so now. Speak boldly, and speak truly, your wishes."

"I will drive no such bargain, noble lord," replied Fitz-Hugh; " 'tis not for that we come."

"Then for what—for what?" cried Margaret, stretching forth her hands towards him imploringly.

"But for this, dear lady," said Fitz-Hugh, "to tell this noble lord that he must fly. When he is gone, we can deal more freely with this proud Regent. We can embrace the proffered mercy, and insure our lives, though we may be bitterly mulcted in our estates."

"But fly!" exclaimed the earl; "how can I fly?"

"More easily than you think," replied Fitz-Hugh. "Last night I foresaw this; and I determined to see what could be done, and to prove whether a single man could not pass unobserved from the castle, and return. Thus I was enabled to make sure of the possibility of success, to arrange completely for your flight, and to gain intelligence of the enemy's dispositions this night. The lad Tyrrel, who was sent here a day or two ago from the Earl of Hereford, undertook the office, went down to the mouth of the Yare, arranged for a small vessel to carry you away, and returned unperceived ere daybreak this morning. An hour after midnight a small boat with one rower will be brought as near the castle as possible. The seneschal has shown me the way by which you can issue forth, as you, my lord, well know, within but a very short distance of the river's bank. The enemy's line touches the river two bow-shots above; but the bank is unguarded, because they know that no boats are there, and because their captain in the town keeps any from passing by day. The night is dark; and seated quietly, without the sound of oars, you can drop slowly down with the current till you are past all danger."

"But if they should see him?" cried Margaret.

"They have no boats to follow," said Fitz-Hugh; "all the rest are at the other end of the town; and ere they could reach them he would be far enough. But, moreover, we will watch well on the battlements in arms; and one blast upon his horn, in case of pursuit, shall set Norwich in such a flame, that, on my life, the soldiers to whom the townsfolk have given admission shall have something else to think of than following a single fugitive. Better we all die, even if the worst befall us, than be forced to capitulate and fall by the axe, or be slaughtered here like a badger in his hole."

"True, true," said the lady. "You are right, Fitz-Hugh."

Norfolk mused for a few moments, and then replied, in a thoughtful tone, "I doubt much, my friend, that your plan will not succeed in that particular, without insuring which it were base cowardice in me to leave you. When we are gone, no such terms will be offered. The prey they seek will have escaped their hands; and they will take vengeance on those that remain. Moreover, your proposal to capitulate will lead to suspicion. I may be followed to the mouth of the Yare. Ships must wait for winds and tides; and thus you will lose your lives without saving me. Better, far better, that to-morrow at dawn I sound a parley, make the best terms for you that I can, and then yield myself to my fate."

"Oh, Heaven forbid!" cried Margaret. "No, Ralph, no. You shall go. I am but a woman; but yet listen to me. We will not let them know that you are gone. For three days you say, my Lord Fitz-Hugh, you can defend this castle. Let us defend it then for two, as if my noble lord were here. I, with my woman's hand, will lead you on, and my life for it, they shall never know that Norfolk is not here."

"You, Margaret, you!" exclaimed the earl, with a faint smile. "No, dear one, no. You must go with me. You must not risk the peril of falling into this harsh prelate's hands."

"Forgive me if I disobey," said Margaret firmly, but tenderly. "Remember, Norfolk, the words that were spoken between us when you asked my hand. Show that you hold me as you promised then you would, not as a pretty painted toy, but as your friend indeed; and let Margaret do her duty, as her heart tells her that duty should be done. You must go alone, my beloved husband; and, as for danger, I fear none.

We will conceal your absence, and defend the place till you are safe away; and we will then make terms as best we may. What! think you he would slay me? Oh, if he dared, he would light up a flame in Norman hearts that soon would scorch stern William on his throne. But it is in vain. There is no man on earth dare hurt a lady for compassing her husband's safety. Say I not right, my Lord Fitz-Hugh, that he must go alone?"

"He must indeed, dear lady," replied the baron; "else 'tis no use that he should go at all. The boat will but hold two men; for 'tis a mere cockle-shell, a painted toy, that skims along the water like a bird, and will not bear much weight. Besides, the more, the greater danger. I thank you, lady, for speaking plainly that which I had no voice to say. It was resolved beforehand that he must go alone. If he will stay, let him not try to make a composition with the enemy; for we will hear of none when he is sacrificed, and are resolved to die within these walls. If the foe break in, we shall all perish—he, and you, and all of us. His only way to save us is to fly, and fly alone."

"Then it must be so," answered Norfolk, sadly; "but remember, Brian, to you I trust the only treasure left me. For pity's sake resist not long. Measure your strength; and, oh, take every heed that you capitulate in time. Heaven, and Heaven's Lord! the thought would drive me mad, if I could deem you would be rash enough to let the place fall by assault, when you have the power to get good terms."

"Fear not, fear not, my lord," replied Fitz-Hugh; "this lady shall soon rejoin you in safety. Of that I pledge my word. Else we will fight to the death, or slay ourselves—and her."

It was a rude speech; but it was a generous one, according to the notions of the day; and Margaret thanked him in her heart for words which might have seemed to others as a threat.

Hours passed rapidly for Norfolk and his bride; for theirs was one of those cases with which "time runs active." Oh, how rapidly they flew till the moment of parting came. Then the earl, disrobed of his armour and lightly clad, with nought but his good sword and dagger by his side, passed down the low-browed passage which led to the most secret and least known sallyport of the castle. No one accompanied him but his seneschal; and the good soldier turned the key in the lock, drew quietly back the bolts, and went out first himself to listen. All was quiet in the town and camp; but above on the castle walls was the tramp of men, and the sentinels calling to each other to ascertain that sleep oppressed not any of the watchers on the battlements of the beleaguered place. In a moment after, he returned, and, with tender reverence, kissed his young lord's hand.

Norfolk passed forth from his stronghold solitary and alone; and the door closed behind him almost without sound.

He was alone in body, but another heart went with him. Quietly, near the gate leading to the town, more than one body of the little garrison had been assembled in arms. Their leaders were on the two towers above, which looked towards the water. Margaret was in a watch turret alone; for she would have none to witness her emotions. She strained her eyes upon the darkness, to catch one look of him she loved; yet she thanked Heaven that she could see nought through the black veil of night. She bent her ear to catch a sound of his progress; yet her heart beat gladly when no sound reached her ear.

"He must have reached the water," she thought. "Hark! Was it a whisper of the wind, or the ripple of a boat?"

She could not tell; but she still watched and listened. Still all was silent. Oh, blessed silence! Had there been a voice, a call, a trumpet-sound, her heart had burst at that moment with its intense emotions. All was still for well-nigh an hour; and then Margaret heard distinctly the march of the party who relieved the sentinels in the town, and the challenge of the watch. "He is safe! Thank God, he is safe!" she said; and, descending from the turret, she sought her solitary chamber, and wept bitterly.

PART VI

THERE were no tears in Margaret's eyes when, the next day, by the rising of the sun, she appeared upon the walls amongst her husband's soldiers. High soul and courageous energy were on her face; and ere she left the battlements the arrows of the enemy were falling round her. Neither then was she long away; for many a time throughout the day she returned, whenever she thought the spirits of the troops might wax faint; and, covering her silk attire with a plain hauberk, she passed round *apparently* as fearless as the oldest soldier there. With smiles, and praises, and thanks, and words of high encouragement, she animated all hearts; and not a man but would have died for that sweet lady with a right good will. Proudly, eagerly, they fought, and laboured under her eye. The bow-string twanged with deadlier aim, the mangonel was sprung with more terrible effect when she was present. She mastered all her woman's fears, though she felt them; and even when an arrow glanced upon her hauberk she started not, nor drew aside.

An old soldier, standing by, saw the shaft fly, and the firm, unblanched look; and, catching the hand of the dauntless girl, he kissed it, exclaiming, "God bless thee, noble lady, take care of your precious life! Were ill to happen to you, all our hearts would die."

The enemy near the walls beheld the old man's actions; and one of William's officers, standing by the Bishop of Bayeux, remarked, "There must be the earl himself. The man kisses his hand. With such affection round him as that, we shall not easily win the place."

"Pour me a plump of arrows on that spot," said Odo. "I do not think it is the earl. He is taller by the head than that stripling hauberk bearer. Yet 'tis no harm to give him a shaft or two."

But, unconscious, Margaret moved away, and, passing through one of the towers, escaped the fate intended for her. Night fell, and still the banner of Norfolk waved upon the walls of the castle; but sooth to say its defenders had hardly strength to wing a shaft, or hurl back a ladder, by the time that the sun set.

Yet Margaret passed one half the night in prayer.

"I would, indeed, essay them again," said Robert Fitzurse to the bishop, as they sat in Odo's tent an hour before sunrise. "We have lost three hundred men already beneath these walls; and if they are determined to die rather than yield their earl to death, you must mitigate the strictness of your first message."

"I dare not," said the bishop. "The king's commands are peremptory, not to promise life to Norfolk."

"Nay, it can be done without that," answered the other; "when men fight with the courage of despair, hope, be it ever so slight, will soon curdle resolution. Reserve the earl a prisoner for the king's disposal—nay, even promise to entreat for him."

The bishop smiled, for he knew his brother well; but he said, "Be it so," and a herald was called, and dispatched once more to the gates.

He undertook the task with some fear, and showed it: but still he went, and was absent well-nigh an hour.

"What say the garrison?" asked the bishop, when at length he returned.

"It is the Earl of Norfolk speaks, mighty and reverend sir," replied the herald. "He says, 'Go and tell the brave and noble Bishop of Bayeux, that Norfolk has not yet wiped off his armour the stains received by a fall from the bishop in a wrestling match near Cambridge. To-morrow, perchance, his hauberk will be clean; and then he will do aught that may be, to show his reverence for the king and honour to the bishop."

"So he can jest!" said Odo. "Well, we will clean his armour for him. Bid the men advance, and tell them, if they win not the walls ere night, I shall hold them cowards and recreants."

His words were without avail. Another day closed, and the banner of Norfolk still waved over the towers of Norwich Castle.

"I must win this place, or I am disgraced," said the Regent to himself, as he looked over a list on the following morning early: "So great a desertion during the night speaks ill of the soldiers' hopes. Ho! call the herald hither. Go ask if they accept our terms," he said, when that officer appeared. "Say, 'tis the last time they will be proffered; and mark them well: life, liberty, and arms, to all men within the walls, except the Earl of Norfolk. To him, a fair appeal to the king's clemency, which I myself undertake to entreat for him. Stay, I will go with you for a part of the way."

The herald once more advanced to the gates, while the troops, drawn up in line, ready for the renewed attack, waited anxiously for the result, well knowing from experience that the lives of many hung upon that moment.

After a brief conversation with some armed men upon the barbican, the herald returned with a more cheerful countenance. "They are mighty bold in words, my lord," he said, "yet will they accept the terms, on the addition of one slight condition, which methinks you will easily grant."

"I will grant no more!" said Odo, fiercely.

"Then they bid you begin the attack at once," said the herald; "and if you do win, 'twill be a bloody victory. Yet hear the condition, mighty lord."

"Well, speak it!" answered the Regent.

"They say," replied the herald, "that you offer life and liberty to every *man* within the walls except the earl; but you say nought of the women. They demand the same assurance for the countess and her maids, and that you will not by any means, direct or indirect, endeavour to separate her from her husband."

"Granted, granted!" cried the prelate with a laugh. "I do not fight with ladies. Back to your tents and sports, good soldiers! The place capitulates, and we shall soon march merrily back to London."

"They must have a charter under your hand and seal, my lord," said the herald, "with that condition clear."

"So be it," said the Regent; and, retiring to his tent with a scribe, the terms were soon set down at full, subscribed, and sealed.

By the tenour of these conditions, the nobles and knights, ever with the exception of Ralph de Guador, Earl of Norfolk, were to march out of Norwich Castle at noon; and the castle, with all its stores, ammunition, and arms, except the personal arms and money of the garrison, was to be surrendered to the Regent; and as the sun neared the meridian, Odo of Bayeux approached the gates, with a large train, to receive possession.

Exactly at the hour appointed, the gate of the barbican was thrown open; and in regular order the train issued forth. First came the archers, two by two, in their steel caps and light shirts of mail, and then the horsemen one by one. They were barefaced; and each paused for an instant before the princely prelate, and turned towards him and his train with an inclination of the head, to let him see that the earl did not pass unnoticed amongst them. When they had proceeded about a hundred yards beyond the bishop, both bodies drew up in array; and then appeared a page, leading a war-horse fully caparisoned. Then came a bevy of terrified girls on horseback, with their veils thrown back and their faces shown; and, at last, on foot, fully armed, leading the horse of the Countess Margaret, appeared Brian Fitz-Hugh. Margaret's beautiful face was somewhat pale; and still she wore the light gabardine of chain-mail which she assumed after her husband's departure. In her hands she bore the keys of the castle; and, slowly approaching the bishop, she offered them to him, as he gazed upon her exceeding beauty with admiration and surprise.

"My lord," she said, "I bring you the keys of Norwich Castle, which I have boldly defended for my husband, its lord. I beseech you to pardon me that I have resisted your power thus long, which I have done only out of duty towards him whom I am bound to love and respect."

"Lady, lady, what is this?" exclaimed the bishop. "You defend the castle! Where is the lord, your husband?"

"I trust at his castle of Dol, in Brittany," replied Margaret; "but perhaps you know better. I have not seen him for some days."

"Out upon it—this is treachery!" exclaimed Odo of Bayeux. "I have a mind to call up the troops, and make every one prisoner."

"Nay, for your honour and good faith," answered Margaret—the look of high courage coming into her face again—"keep your plighted word with a woman."

"But it was gained from us treacherously," exclaimed the bishop; "or, more likely still, you have taken advantage of our easy trust, and passed him forth from the castle since the treaty was signed."

"No, on my honour," answered Margaret. "He has not been within these walls for several days. 'Tis I who have defended them. I have commanded. I have shared the soldiers' danger. Had your eyes been sharp, you might have seen me on the battlements; for I saw you right well. But there is no mistaking Odo of Bayeux," she added; "me, in my littleness, your eyes might well pass over."

"I do remember, I do remember," said the bishop thoughtfully. "I saw a slight form, like a woman's, on the walls, and a soldier kiss her hand."

"Well, then," continued Margaret, "as you are noble, gentleman, prelate, and Christian prince, keep faith with that woman, and own she has done well in using her small power to cover her lord's retreat. You will find, within those walls, I have kept faith with you. I have left all, and everything, except that which is merely needful for my journey. Arms, stores which would have held out the place for many a week, jewels, and plate, and money—all are there. So help me

Heaven, as I would not in the least violate the convention to which we both have pledged ourselves. Do you keep it too, my lord, and bring no dishonour on your noble name."

"Well, be it so," replied the bishop. "For my own part, lady, I would fain keep you with me, and show you to the world as a marvel of true love and faithfulness. But I will do no wrong to Fitz-Osborne's daughter; although, in truth, I fear my good, stern brother will look somewhat askance at me, when he hears I have let Norfolk slip out of my grasp."

As he spoke, he advanced on foot to the side of her horse, and gallantly kissed her hand. "Wait yet one moment," he said, "I will mount and escort you past our lines; and I beseech you, tell your lord, that were I not wedded to the Church, I should envy him his earthly bride."

The colour mounted into Margaret's cheek; but she merely bowed her head in silence, and then, accompanied by the bishop and his train on horseback, passed on her way till she was two miles from Norwich.

There Odo took his leave; and Margaret and her little band rode forward.

PART VII

Some months had passed since the fall of Norwich Castle, when, at the small town of St. Hilaire, on the confines of Brittany and Normandy, a lady sat alone and wept. A few minutes after, a nun entered the room with a beaming face.

"Weep not, dear lady, weep not," she exclaimed, "there are better tidings. Your noble lord may yet be saved."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Margaret, starting up, and brushing the tears from her eyes; "indeed!" but then she shook her head, and in a sorrowful tone added, "It is impossible. Has not the tyrant sworn, that he will leave his bones beneath the walls of Dol, or have the blood of my dear husband?"

"True, true," said the nun; "but man strives in vain against God's will. The King of France is marching with a mighty power. The Duke of Brittany is in arms likewise. This news is three days old, dear lady; and ere now——"

"A battle may have been fought, and my poor Norfolk lost!" replied Margaret sadly.

"Think not so, think not so," said the nun. "Put your trust in God, and he will deliver you."

"I have no other trust," answered Margaret. "I do beseech you, good sister, send out one of my people to gather news. 'Tis strange we are so near, and tidings come so tardily.—Hark! what is that?"

"Horse galloping through the streets!" cried the nun. "I will go up into the tower above the gates and see.—Joy, joy, lady!" cried the nun, returning after a short absence; "Dol is delivered! the siege is raised! Yesterday at noon the King of France appeared; and William instantly commenced his retreat. The earl, they say, came forth with all his troops, fell on his rear, and took his camp and baggage."

Margaret clasped her hands, and raised her eyes to heaven. "Now God send us peace at last!" she said. "If I know Norfolk well, he will be moderate in victory. Now, good sister, I will to the chapel, and pray to God to grant me the spirit of peace, although I fear this stern King of England, who by war has risen and thriven, will still keep the sword undrawn. Oh, how many woes there are in ambition!"

Margaret knelt and prayed; and before the altar she remained more than an hour; and her whole heart was with her prayers. So much so, that she noticed not the sounds without. Yet there was noise enough in the small town; for every moment arrived fresh troops from before Dol, though the trumpet sounded not, and the voice of the clarion was still.

At length she was roused by a ringing step upon the pavement of the chapel. It was firm and equal but very slow; and, turning round, she beheld a noble-looking man covered with a steel hauberk, but with his head bare. On his heels were gilded spurs, or goads as they ought rather to be called, for the place of rowels was supplied by a long sharp point; and his sword, unbuckled, was in his hand, with the cross pressed upon his breast. His air was very grave, and his features were stern and sharp. His eyes were fixed upon her; and he said, as he approached, "Let me not interrupt your devotions, lady; I, too, come to pray."

"May your devotions be blessed," replied Margaret, with a feeling of dread, she knew not well why.

"How know you what my prayer may be?" said the stranger.

"Because I would fain believe," replied Margaret, "that there is not one man on earth so impious as to bring to this holy place, and to offer to the throne of God, a criminal desire or unjust petition."

"Indeed!" said the stranger, gazing at her. "Have your prayers, too, been so high and holy, that the all-seeing Eye—which pierces through the veil of mortal selfishness, and sees the naked passions of man's heart—can look well pleased into your bosom and grant its utmost desires?"

"I humbly trust so," answered Margaret, overawed by the stern, bold man before her. "My prayers have been for peace—for peace through the Lord of peace. I have prayed that God would so turn the hearts of men and kings, that they should lay aside hate and animosity, pride and vengeance, and, remembering that they are brothers, seek that which was the essence of good tidings from on High, when angels proclaimed to the shepherds the coming of the King of Glory *to bring peace.*"

"And did no other aspiration mingle with your prayers?" demanded the stranger. "Did you not ask triumph for a husband's arms, the downfall and reverse of tyrants, and vengeance for loss and wrong?"

"No; God forbid," cried Margaret, earnestly, "that I should insult God's glory by such prayers as that! Strange sir, I know not who you are that venture thus to question me; but all I asked was—peace."

"Stay," cried the stranger, as she was turning away. "Your prayer is granted, lady. Mine might have been of a less holy nature, had I not met an angel to show a better way.—Ho! without there. Bring in the treaty they proffer! Give me a pen. Here, on this holy altar, will I sign the peace which I just now refused; and God so help me as I keep it well."

A number of attendants poured into the chapel at his call, and one bore a large parchment, which he spread upon the altar. Another held an ink-glass; and the stranger, bending one knee upon the step, wrote in a bold free hand the one word—

WILLIAM

Then, taking the parchment, he held it towards Margaret, saying, "Take it, lady! Bear it to your husband and his allies, and tell them that your virtues have wrung from William of England that which he had refused even to their successful arms. You were the first cause of war between us—you be the messenger of peace; for, now that I have seen and known you, I can well believe a man would peril life and fortune, his own repose, and a kingdom's safety, sooner than lose your hand." *

GEORGE BORROW

(1803–1881)

GEORGE HENRY BORROW, born at East Dereham in Norfolk, of a military family, early manifested those strong religious tendencies that were so to influence his life and work. Early travels with his father's regiment gave him a width of outlook and experience peculiar in a child of his age, and doubtless helped to cultivate that *Wanderlust* with which his after life was infected. Edinburgh High School gave him a sound education. A gift for languages and an extraordinary penchant for the life and history of the Egyptians (or Gipsies, as we should now call them) made clear the trend his development was taking. After five dull years at a desk in London, Borrow exchanged the safety of Tuck's Court, St. Giles, Norwich, for the hazards of Grub Street. His health failing, he left London for "a life of roving adventure." The result is seen in the main part of *Lavengro* (1851). With that came recognition and freedom. Other famous works were *The Gypsies in Spain* (1840), *The Bible in Spain* (1843), *The Romany Rye* (1857), and *Wild Wales* (1862).

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* The defeat of William before Dol, and his subsequent treaty of peace with the Count of Anjou, the Duke of Brittany, the King of France, and Ralph de Guador, are mentioned by almost all historians. The Earldom of Norfolk was never restored; but, by this treaty, Ralph was secured in possession of all his continental lordships, and the plunder of William's camp was estimated at the value of £15,000—an enormous sum in those days.

"The Flaming Tinman's Fight" is reprinted from *Lavengro*.

THE FLAMING TINMAN'S FIGHT

AFTER walking some time, I found myself on the great road, at the same spot where I had turned aside the day before with my new-made acquaintance, in the direction of his house. I now continued my journey as before, towards the north. The weather, though beautiful, was much cooler than it had been for some time past; I walked at a great rate, with a springing and elastic step. In about two hours I came to where a kind of cottage stood a little way back from the road, with a huge oak before it, under the shade of which stood a little pony and a cart, which seemed to contain various articles. I was going past—when I saw scrawled over the door of the cottage, "Good beer sold here"; upon which, feeling myself all of a sudden very thirsty, I determined to go in and taste the beverage.

I entered a well-sanded kitchen, and seated myself on a bench, on one side of a long white table; the other side, which was nearest the wall, was occupied by a party, or rather family, consisting of a grimy-looking man, somewhat under the middle size, dressed in faded velveteens, and wearing a leather apron—a rather pretty-looking woman, but sun-burnt, and meanly dressed, and two ragged children, a boy and girl, about four or five years old. The man sat with his eyes fixed upon the table, supporting his chin with both his hands; the woman, who was next to him, sat quite still, save that occasionally she turned a glance upon her husband with eyes that appeared to have been lately crying. The children had none of the vivacity so general at their age. A more disconsolate family I had never seen; a mug, which, when filled, might contain half a pint, stood empty before them; a very disconsolate party indeed.

"House!" said I; "House!" and then as nobody appeared, I cried again as loud as I could, "House! do you hear me, House!"

"What's your pleasure, young man?" said an elderly woman, who now made her appearance from a side apartment.

"To taste your ale," said I.

"How much?" said the woman, stretching out her hand towards the empty mug upon the table.

"The largest measure-full in your house," said I, putting back her hand gently. "This is not the season for half-pint mugs."

"As you will, young man," said the landlady; and presently brought in an earthen pitcher which might contain about three pints, and which foamed and frothed withal.

"Will this pay for it?" said I, putting down sixpence.

"I have to return you a penny," said the landlady, putting her hand into her pocket.

"I want no change," said I, flourishing my hand with an air.

"As you please, young gentleman," said the landlady, and then making a kind of curtsy, she again retired to the side apartment.

"Here is your health, sir," said I to the grimy-looking man, as I raised the pitcher to my lips.

The tinker, for such I supposed him to be, without altering his posture, raised his eyes, looked at me for a moment, gave a slight nod, and then once more fixed his eyes upon the table. I took a draught of the ale, which I found excellent. "Won't you drink?" said I, holding the pitcher to the tinker.

The man again lifted his eyes, looked at me, and then at the pitcher, and then at me again. I thought at one time that he was about to shake his head in sign of refusal, but no, he looked once more at the pitcher, and the temptation was too strong. Slowly removing his head from his arms, he took the pitcher, sighed, nodded, and drank a tolerable quantity, and then set the pitcher down before me upon the table.

"You had better mend your draught," said I to the tinker, "it is a sad heart that never rejoices."

"That's true," said the tinker, and again raising the pitcher to his lips, he mended his draught as I had bidden him, drinking a larger quantity than before.

"Pass it to your wife," said I.

The poor woman took the pitcher from the man's hand; before, however, raising it to her lips, she looked at the children. True mother's heart, thought I to myself, and taking the half-pint mug, I made her fill it, and then held it to the children, causing each to take a draught. The woman wiped her eyes with the corner of her gown, before she raised the pitcher and drank to my health.

In about five minutes none of the family looked half so disconsolate as before, and the tinker and I were in deep discourse.

Oh, genial and gladdening is the power of good ale, the true and proper drink of Englishmen. He is not deserving of the name of Englishman who speaketh against ale, that is good ale, like that which has just made merry the hearts of this poor family; and yet there are beings, calling themselves Englishmen, who say that it is a sin to drink a cup of ale, and who, on coming to this passage, will be tempted to fling down the book and exclaim, "The man is evidently a bad man, for behold, by his own confession, he is not only fond of ale himself, but is in the habit of tempting other people with it." Alas! alas! what a number of silly individuals there are in this world; I wonder what they would have had me do in this instance—given the afflicted family a cup of cold water? go to! They could have found water in the road, for there was a pellucid spring only a few yards distant from the house, as they were well aware—but they wanted not water; what should I have given them? meat and bread? go to! They were not hungry; there was stifled sobbing in their bosoms, and the first mouthful of strong meat would have choked them. What should I have given them? Money! what right had I to insult them by offering them money? Advice! words, words, words; friends, there is a time for everything; there is a time for a cup of cold water; there is a time for strong meat and bread; there is a time for advice, and there is a time for ale; and I have generally found that the time for advice is after a cup of ale. I do not say many cups; the tongue then speaketh more smoothly, and the ear listeneth more benignantly; but why do I attempt to reason with you? do I not know you for conceited creatures, with one idea—and that a foolish one; a crotchet, for the sake of which ye would sacrifice anything, religion if required—country? There, fling down my book, I do not wish ye to walk any farther in my company, unless you cast your nonsense away, which ye will never do, for it is the breath of your nostrils; fling down my book, it was not written to support a crotchet, for know one thing, my good people, I have invariably been an enemy to humbug.

"Well," said the tinker, after we had discoursed some time, "I little thought when I first saw you, that you were of my own trade."

MYSELF. Nor am I, at least not exactly. There is not much difference, 'tis true, between a tinker and a smith.

TINKER. You are a whitesmith, then?

MYSELF. Not I, I'd scorn to be anything so mean; no, friend, black's the colour; I am a brother of the horseshoe. Success to the hammer and tongs.

TINKER. Well, I shouldn't have thought you had been a blacksmith by your hands.

MYSELF. I have seen them, however, as black as yours. The truth is, I have not worked for many a day.

TINKER. Where did you serve first?

MYSELF. In Ireland.

TINKER. That's a good way off, isn't it?

MYSELF. Not very far; over those mountains to the left, and the run of salt water that lies behind them, there's Ireland.

TINKER. It's a fine thing to be a scholar.

MYSELF. Not half so fine as to be a tinker.

TINKER. How you talk!

MYSELF. Nothing but the truth; what can be better than to be one's own master? Now a tinker is his own master, a scholar is not. Let us suppose the best of scholars, a schoolmaster, for example, for I suppose you will admit that no one can be higher in scholarship than a schoolmaster; do you call his a pleasant life? I don't; we should call him a school-slave, rather than a schoolmaster. Only conceive him in blessed weather like this, in his close school, teaching children to write in copy-books, "Evil communications corrupt good manners," or "You cannot touch pitch without defilement," or to spell out of Abecedariums, or to read out of Jack Smith, or Sandford and Merton. Only conceive him, I say, drudging in such guise from morning till night, without any rational enjoyment but to beat the children. Would you compare such a dog's life as that with your own—the happiest under heaven—true Eden life, as the Germans would say—pitching your tent under the pleasant hedge-rows, listening to the song of the feathered tribes, collecting all the leaky kettles in the neighbourhood, soldering and joining, earning your honest bread by the wholesome sweat of your brow—making ten holes—hey, what's this? what's the man crying for?

Suddenly the tinker had covered his face with his hands, and begun to sob and moan like a man in the deepest distress; the breast of his wife was heaved with emotion; even the children were agitated, the youngest began to roar.

MYSELF. What's the matter with you; what are you all crying about?

TINKER (*uncovering his face*). Lord, why to hear you talk; isn't that enough to make anybody cry—even the poor babes? Yes, you said right, 'tis life in the Garden of Eden—the tinker's; I see so now that I'm about to give it up.

MYSELF. Give it up! you must not think of such a thing.

TINKER. No, I can't bear to think of it, and yet I must; what's to be done? How hard to be frightened to death, to be driven off the roads.

MYSELF. Who has driven you off the roads?

TINKER. Who! the Flaming Tinman.

MYSELF. Who is he?

TINKER. The biggest rogue in England, and the cruellest, or he wouldn't have served me as he has done—I'll tell you all about it. I was born upon the roads, and so was my father before me, and my mother too; and I worked with them as long as they lived, as a dutiful child, for I have nothing to reproach myself with on their account; and when my father died I took up the business, and went his beat, and supported my mother for the little time she lived; and when she died I married this young woman, who was not born upon the roads, but was a small tradesman's daughter, at Glo'ster. She had a kindness for me, and, notwithstanding her friends were against the match, she married the poor tinker, and came to live with him upon the roads. Well, young man, for six or seven years I was the happiest fellow breathing, living just the life you described just now—respected by everybody in this beat; when in an evil hour comes this Black Jack, this Flaming Tinman, into these parts, driven as they say out of Yorkshire—for no good, you may be sure. Now there is no beat will support two tinkers, as you doubtless know; mine was a good one, but it would not support the flying tinker and myself, though if it would have supported twenty it would have been all the same to the flying villain, who'll brook no one but himself; so he presently finds me out, and offers to fight me for the beat. Now, being bred upon the roads, I can fight a little, that is with anything like my match, but I was not going to fight him, who happens to be twice my size, and so I told him; whereupon he knocks me down, and would have done me further mischief had not some men been nigh and prevented him; so he threatened to cut my throat, and went his way. Well, I did not like such usage at all, and was woundily frightened, and tried to keep as much out of his way as possible, going anywhere but where I thought I was likely to meet him; and sure enough for several months I contrived to keep out of his way. At last somebody told me that he was gone back to Yorkshire, whereupon I was glad at heart, and ventured to show myself, going here and there as I did before. Well, young man, it was yesterday that I and mine set ourselves down in a lane, about five miles from here, and lighted our fire, and had our dinner, and after dinner I sat down to mend three kettles and a frying pan which the people in the neighbourhood had given me to mend—for, as I told you before, I have a good connection, owing to my honesty. Well, as I sat there hard at work, happy as the day's long, and thinking of anything but what was to happen, who should come up but this Black Jack, this king of the tinkers, rattling along in his cart, with his wife, that they call Grey Moll, by his side—for the villain has got a wife, and a maid-servant too; the last I never saw, but they that has, says that she is as big as a house, and young, and well to look at, which can't be all said of Moll, who, though she's big enough in all conscience, is neither young nor handsome. Well, no sooner does he see me and mine, than giving the reins to Grey Moll, he springs out of his cart, and comes straight at me; not a word did he say, but on he comes straight at me like a wild bull. I am a quiet man, young fellow, but I saw now that quietness would be of no use, so I sprang up upon my legs, and being bred upon the roads, and able to fight a little, I squared as he came running in upon me, and had a round or two with him. Lord bless you, young man, it was like a fly fighting with an elephant—one of those big beasts the show-folks carry about. I had not a chance with the fellow, he knocked me here, he knocked me there, knocked me into the hedge, and knocked me out again. I was at my last shifts, and my poor wife saw it. Now my poor wife, though she is as gentle as a pigeon, has yet a spirit of her own, and though she wasn't bred upon the roads, can scratch a little, so when she saw me at my last shifts, she flew at the villain—she couldn't bear to see her partner murdered—and scratched the villain's face. Lord bless you, young man, she had better have been quiet: Grey Moll no sooner saw what she was about, than springing out of the cart, where she had sat all along perfectly quiet, saving a little whooping and screeching to encourage her blade—Grey Moll, I say (my flesh creeps when I think of it—for I am a kind husband, and love my poor wife)——

Myself. Take another draught of the ale; you look frightened, and it will do you good. Stout liquor makes a stout heart, as the man says in the play.

Tinker. That's true, young man; here's to you—where was I? Grey Moll no sooner saw what my wife was about, than springing out of the cart, she flew at my poor wife, clawed off her bonnet in a moment, and seized hold of her hair. Lord bless you, young man, my poor wife, in the hands of Grey Moll, was nothing better than a pigeon in the claws of a buzzard hawk, or I in the hands of the Flaming Tinman, which when I saw, my heart was fit to burst, and I determined to give up everything—everything to save my poor wife out of Grey Moll's claws. "Hold!" I shouted. "Hold, both of you—Jack, Moll. Hold, both of you, for God's sake, and I'll do what you will: give up the trade, and business, connection, bread, and everything, never more travel the roads, and go down on my knees to you in the bargain." Well, this had some effect: Moll let go my wife, and the blazing tinman stopped for a moment; it was only for a moment, however, that he left off—all of a sudden he hit me a blow which sent me against a tree; and what did the villain then? why the flying villain seized me by the throat, and almost throttled me, roaring—what do you think, young man, that the flaming villain roared out?

Myself. I really don't know—something horrible, I suppose.

Tinker. Horrible, indeed; you may well say horrible, young man; neither more nor less than the Bible—"a Bible, a Bible!" roared the blazing tinman; and he pressed my throat so hard against the tree that my senses began to dwaul away—a Bible, a Bible, still ringing in my ears. Now, young man, my poor wife is a Christian woman, and, though she travels the roads, carries a Bible with her at the bottom of her sack, with which sometimes she teaches the children to read—it was the only thing she brought with her from the place of her kith and kin, save her own body and the clothes on her back; so my poor wife, half distracted, runs to her sack, pulls out the Bible, and puts it into the hand of the blazing tinman, who then thrusts the end of it into my mouth with such fury that it made my lips bleed, and broke short one of my teeth which happened to be decayed. "Swear," said he, "swear, you mumping villain, take your Bible oath that you will quit and give up the beat altogether, or I'll"—and then the hard-hearted villain made me swear by the Bible, and my own damnation, half-throttled as I was—to—to—I can't go on——

MYSELF. Take another draught—stout liquor——

TINKER. I can't, young man, my heart's too full, and what's more, the pitcher is empty.

MYSELF. And so he swore you, I suppose, on the Bible, to quit the roads?

TINKER. You are right, he did so, the gipsy villain.

MYSELF. Gipsy! Is he a gipsy?

TINKER. Not exactly; what they call a half and half. His father was a gipsy, and his mother, like mine, one who walked the roads.

MYSELF. Is he of the Smiths—the Petulengres?

TINKER. I say, young man, you know a thing or two; one would think, to hear you talk, you had been bred upon the roads. I thought none but those bred upon the roads knew anything of that name—Petulengres! No, not he, he fights the Petulengres whenever he meets them; he likes nobody but himself, and wants to be king of the roads. I believe he is a Boss, or a—at any rate he's a bad one, as I know to my cost.

MYSELF. And what are you going to do?

TINKER. Do! you may well ask that; I don't know what to do. My poor wife and I have been talking of that all the morning, over that half-pint mug of beer; we can't determine on what's to be done. All we know is, that we must quit the roads. The villain swore that the next time he saw us on the roads he'd cut all our throats, and seize our horse and bit of cart that are now standing out there under the tree.

MYSELF. And what do you mean to do with your horse and cart?

TINKER. Another question! What shall we do with our cart and pony? they are of no use to us now. Stay on the roads I will not, both for my oath's sake and my own. If we had a trifle of money, we were thinking of going to Bristol, where I might get up a little business, but we have none; our last three farthings we spent about the mug of beer.

Myself. But why don't you sell your horse and cart?

Tinker. Sell them, and who would buy them, unless someone who wished to set up in my line; but there's no beat, and what's the use of the horse and cart and the few tools without the beat?

Myself. I'm half inclined to buy your cart and pony, and your beat too.

Tinker. You! How came you to think of such a thing?

Myself. Why, like yourself, I hardly know what to do. I want a home and work. As for a home, I suppose I can contrive to make a home out of your tent and cart; and as for work, I must learn to be a tinker, it would not be hard for one of my trade to learn to tinker; what better can I do? Would you have me go to Chester and work there now? I don't like the thoughts of it. If I go to Chester and work there, I can't be my own man; I must work under a master, and perhaps he and I should quarrel, and when I quarrel I am apt to hit folks, and those that hit folks are sometimes sent to prison; I don't like the thought either of going to Chester or to Chester prison. What do you think I could earn at Chester?

Tinker. A matter of eleven shillings a week, if anybody would employ you, which I don't think they would with those hands of yours. But whether they would or not, if you are of a quarrelsome nature, you must not go to Chester; you would be in the castle in no time. I don't know how to advise you. As for selling you my stock, I'd see you further first, for your own sake.

Myself. Why?

Tinker. Why! you would get your head knocked off. Suppose you were to meet him?

Myself. Pooh, don't be afraid on my account; if I were to meet him I could easily manage him one way or other. I know all kinds of strange words and names, and, as I told you before, I sometimes hit people when they put me out.

Here the tinker's wife, who for some minutes past had been listening attentively to our discourse, interposed, saying, in a low soft tone: "I really don't see, John, why you shouldn't sell the young man the things, seeing that he wishes for them, and is so confident; you have told him plainly how matters stand, and if anything ill should befall him, people couldn't lay the blame on you; but I don't think any ill will befall him, and who knows but God has sent him to our assistance in time of need."

"I'll hear of no such thing," said the tinker; "I have drunk at the young man's expense, and though he says he's quarrelsome, I would not wish to sit in pleasanter company. A pretty fellow I should be, now, if I were to let him follow his own will. If he once sets up on my beat, he's a lost man, his ribs will be stove in, and his head knocked off his shoulders. There, you are crying, but you shan't have your will, though; I won't be the young man's destruction. If, indeed, I thought he could manage the tinker—but he never can; he says he can hit, but it's no use hitting the tinker;—crying still! you are enough to drive one mad. I say, young man, I believe you understand a thing or two, just now you were talking of knowing hard words and names—I don't wish to send you to your mischief—you say you know hard words and names; let us see. Only on one condition I'll sell you the pony and things; as for the beat it's gone, isn't mine—sworn away by my mouth. Tell me what's my name; if you can't, may I——"

MYSELF. Don't swear, it's a bad habit, neither pleasant nor profitable. Your name is Slingsby—Jack Slingsby. There, don't stare, there's nothing in my telling you your name: I've been in these parts before, at least not very far from here. Ten years ago, when I was little more than a child, I was about twenty miles from here in a post chaise, at the door of an inn, and as I looked from the window of the chaise, I saw you standing by a gutter, with a big tin ladle in your hand, and somebody called you Jack Slingsby. I never forget anything I hear or see; I can't, I wish I could. So there's nothing strange in my knowing your name; indeed, there's nothing strange in anything, provided you examine it to the bottom. Now what am I to give you for the things?

I paid Slingsby five pounds ten shillings for his stock in trade, cart, and pony—purchased sundry provisions of the landlady, also a waggoner's frock, which had belonged to a certain son of hers, deceased, gave my little animal a feed of corn, and prepared to depart.

"God bless you, young man," said Slingsby, shaking me by the hand, "you are the best friend I've had for many a day: I have but one thing to tell you, Don't cross that fellow's path if you can help it; and stay—should the pony refuse to go, just touch him so, and he'll fly like the wind."

DOUGLAS JERROLD

(1803–1857)

DOUGLAS JERROLD, after several years of struggle, made a great success with his nautical play, *Black-Eyed Susan, or, All in the Downs* (1829). When *Punch* was founded he joined the staff, and contributed "Mrs. Caudle's Curtain Lectures" (1846), which had an immense vogue, by reason of its character-drawing, its wit and humour. His other works include *The Story of a Feather*

(1844), *The Chronicles of Clovernook* (1846), and *A Man Made of Money.*

"The Preacher Parrot" is reprinted from *Cakes and Ale.*

THE PREACHER PARROT

CHAPTER I

"TRUTH," says John Milton, "is rarely born but, like a bastard, to the shame of him who begets it." Let not the veracious reader start at this dreary faith; for the same author goes on to declare that time at length legitimatises the base-born, and removes the odium from its father. Thus, though the living martyr may be burned to cinders, it may so happen that the greatest veneration shall be paid to his ashes. Now—as we are given to understand from gentlemen of the learned profession, members of Parliament, party politicians, and other consumers of the precious manna—though truth be an inestimable treasure, still for that reason it is not to be produced on every light occasion. In the first place, a too great familiarity with it begets indifference. To be always speaking the truth, what is it but to wear a court-suit every day—to go shopping in hoop, stomacher, and diamonds? We shall never forget the apothegm of a late lamented attorney, whose only son—how he acquired the antipathy yet remains a mystery—had an invincible aversion to a lie. "Joseph," said the father, with something like tears in his eyes, "Joseph, Heaven knows how soon I may be taken from you and therefore I cannot too frequently check your preposterous extravagance. Truth, Joseph, is like gold; a really wise man makes a little of it go a long way." To our mind, nothing can be finer, nothing can be more profound than this axiom. Truth *is* like gold; for how often does a reckless use of it bring its utterer to beggary? Let the fate of our hero be taken as an example.

"One pound one—the bird is yours, sir, cage and all." Thus spoke Mr. Brown, the auctioneer, declaring a parrot, one of a dozen that had been twenty times put up without a purchaser, to be the property of the guinea bidder. The owner of the bird knew not the dangerous treasure he possessed. The parrot was a very Solomon in feathers; and though its possessor failed to appreciate the virtue, like true wisdom, it was sparing of speech. Its master, mistaking silence for inability, disposed of the bird as a blockhead, though if it liked, it could fifty times a day have called itself a clever fellow. However, there was this besetting sin in the bird—it never opened its mouth but it uttered an awkward truth, blurted out a sentence turned with satire, reproach, or contempt. What it said would at times fall with a fatal crash upon the cogitations of its hearers, making them doubt if Beelzebub spoke not through a parrot. Unfortunately for its future quiet, its long sojourn in the room of the auctioneer had enabled it to store its memory with the choicest scraps of the orator; which undigested exclamations, interrogatories, opinions, and appeals, it would too frequently utter to the confusion of its owners.

Our martyr to truth—the parrot—became the property of the lady of Mr. Phocion, a gentleman who had struggled through many difficulties to become a member of Parliament, some of his difficulties being considerably lessened by the attainment of the dignity: yes, he was a senator, to the confusion of his tailor. He was a man of considerable powers of address, being heard at any part of Copenhagen Fields, whenever he there condescended to deliver his sentiments. As his opinions were not fixed, he was in the happiest condition for improvement. If he had not read a great deal of history, he had attended and spoken at many public dinners. If he had cared to shine in that way, he could have argued in the style of Fox or Burke; but the days were gone for rhetorical speeches: no, the spirit of the times demanded brevity, and it was much easier to call names. Indeed, Mr. Phocion successfully exercised the great art of life—the art of gracefully concealing our ignorance. He was a man with a face of undaunted metal, and with nerves equally strong, if not of the same material. Sublimely unconscious of the ridiculous, he soared above his own deficiencies, and was never so elevated as when utterly incomprehensible. Though not quite sufficiently skilled in the graces of literature to become a professor of poetry, he never made a speech without the support of the muse. No, never did he speak of the "poor man" but the oration was decked with that fringe of untarnished gold—

Princes and lords may flourish and may fade,
A breath can make them as a breath has made;
But a bold peasantry, their nation's pride,
When once destroyed, can never be supplied.

On what he would call the philosophy of society he had his own recondite opinions, for the adoption of which, as he would often lament, the world was not yet sufficiently prepared. That, however, all the generations of man had been begotten and educated on a wrong principle, was his unconquerable faith. With a severe disregard of the ornaments and what are called refinements of life, he would have looked on the statue of the Medicean Venus and asked, "*cui bono?*" or, in his own downright nervous English, "What's the use of it?" He would have resigned the Elgin marbles to the hammers of MacAdam, and covered a polling-booth with the canvases of Raphael. In a word, he was a mushroom patriot, a thing produced by the corruption of the times. Yet, let it not be thought that Mr. Phocion would recant his faith in the hour of danger. Not so: he rather courted persecution.

Often would he declare his readiness to lay his head upon the block; and so entirely was his wife influenced by some of his patriotic sentiments that she would hear him with more than Roman serenity. As for the Queen's Bench Prison, it was the vestibule to the house of fame: and Newgate itself might, to a public man, become little less than the Mint. And this was the exalted creed of Mr. Phocion, until a full week after his admission to the House of Commons. We know not whether such a happy change comes upon all young members, but certainly Mr. Phocion talked less, and at least appeared more thoughtful. And this serious mood took a deeper shadow from a sermon, which the senator accidentally heard, on the miracle of the loaves and the fishes. Mrs. Phocion remarked it, and ventured to observe that nowhere could we get such true consolation as at church. Mr. Phocion looked pale and severely calm as the bust of Brutus, but replied not.

It was an evening on which there was "no house," and Mr. and Mrs. Phocion sat with the only thing that ought ever to divide man and wife—namely, a book—between them. The book was *Malthus on Population*. Our statesman had no children; and Mrs. Phocion, who had merely looked at the title-page of the volume, contemplated her husband at his new studies with singular complacency. She would look meekly at her mate, and in the pride of her heart, feel certain that some public or private good must come of such hard reading. Mr. Phocion put aside the book, and leaned his head on his hand.

" 'Tis now two months since you've taken your seat, my dear; pray when do you think you'll get anything?"

"Get anything?" responded Mr. Phocion. "What should I get but the proved satisfaction of—of—I desire, madam, that you never again allude to so base a sentiment. Get anything! I should despise myself could I be induced to take office."

"Well, but a salary," observed Mrs. Phocion, "or—a something that——" Mr. Phocion frowned very darkly, and his wife was silent. Weeks went on, and Mr. Phocion gradually lost that serenity of temper which, up to his return to Parliament, had made his house a dovecot. Mrs. Phocion, in the simplicity of her soul, thought that law-making could not be so very respectable an employment, if it kept husbands out until four and five in the morning, and then sent them home more like ogres than rational, considerate helpmates. To do Mr. Phocion justice, no member was more regular in his attendance, more sedulous in his indirect attentions to the minister, more watchful of the public money. Still, it was but too evident that the dearest wish of his heart was unsatisfied. His merits and his zeal were alike undiscerned. He had, it is true, a vote in the House, but, for what it brought him, he might as well have had a voice in the great pyramid. Again and again Mr. Phocion, with grimmer looks and more passionate voice, declared that he should feel himself a wretch for ever could he be won to accept anything. "No! to him, place was little better than the pillory. He would maintain his independence—he would return to his constituents with white hands."

Mrs. Phocion marvelled at the obstinacy of the man; and one morning, after a late debate, resolved to speak out. "What! was he mad enough to refuse a salary, for—if it pleased Providence—doing nothing? Was he——?"

"Mrs. Phocion, I have seen too many sad examples of political tergiversation to add to the black number. I have seen the patriot of to-day the pensioner of to-morrow." Mrs. Phocion seemed to smile approval of the promotion. "But no; be it my glory to prove that there is still some public virtue left. And know, if I hold off from golden temptation—if I refuse, with inexpressible scorn, to sell myself to the minister, it is for this proud reason, that I have had——"

"No bidders!"

"Good God! Who's that?" cried the patriot, turning pale, as though called by the accusing angel.

"No bidders! no bidders! no bidders!" replied the parrot from its auction vocabulary.

Mr. Phocion stared and gasped at the bird, as if a demon spoke in it —a malignant spirit that had possessed itself of the heart of the statesman's mystery—of the secret that had lain like an ulcer in his heart, tormenting him with scheming days and anxious nights. There was something awful—appalling—supernatural, in the words; or rather, there was a terrible humanity in them, that, as the patriot glared upon the bird, suggested to him the probability of a metempsychosis. "Had a Sir Robert Walpole been transmigrated into a parrot?"

"In the name of heaven, Mrs. Phocion," said her husband, taking breath from his astonishment, "where did you get that plague?"

"No bidders!" said the irritating parrot. Unhappily, there lay upon the table a copy of the report of the Law Commission. It will give the reader a very favourable idea of Mr. Phocion's strength when we state that he seized the tome with one hand, and flung it at the speaker. The corner of the book caught the right eye of the bird, and extinguished its light. We ardently trust the only case of blindness effected by the "commission."

"Nay, I am sure, my dear——" It was all in vain; Mrs. Phocion, with all her eloquence, failed to convince the member of the many little amiable ways of her loquacious treasure, and well she might, for every morning, after a long and heavy debate, Mr. Phocion, jaded, drowsy, bilious, was accosted by the parrot with a loud protracted chuckle, and *"no bidders!"*

In a very short time the parrot was thrust, with curses on its head, from the hearth of the senator.

Mr. Phocion, we regret to say, in due season illustrated the instability of human genius; for he accepted a place, which he held until his speedy death, a fact commemorated on a tombstone in that extensive churchyard, Sierra Leone.

CHAPTER II

LAURENCE MARVEDI was a man of gold. His boyish practices and shifts had been those of a miser. He was now upwards of sixty, of an infirm constitution, but of immense worldly possessions. As he grew older, his passion for wealth absorbed every feeling, every sentiment, every hope, every fear, save one—the fear of death—and this dread he ever sought to escape from by retreating to the contemplation of his hoards. He would almost persuade himself of the impossibility of death striking him amidst his treasures. Poor wretch! he had, through life, seen nothing beyond a guinea, and could not now look forward. He had had no sympathy with men; with his money-bags he had made a wall between his heart and them; and he shuddered, and could hardly suppress a howl as he thought of the common doom that would involve him, naked, shivering, stripped of his privilege, with his kind. It was this horror of the grave that made him anxiously avoid the sight of all types of mortality; that made him forbid his niece and housekeeper to breathe a word of death. His apothecary, taking the cue, showed no more knowledge of death than if he had been to him the greatest stranger. Now and then his niece, gathering her information from the newspaper, would speak of a Russian peasant—it must be the paternal softness of the government that induces people to live so long in Russia—who had just died at a hundred and ninety. On this a slimy smile would streak the face of Marvedi, who, however, would soon relapse into melancholy, pathetically declaring that "Russia was not England!"

"There!—that bell—there again—new churches! ugh!" cried the man of wealth, and he clasped his hands, and set his teeth, and his back was bowed like a hoop, and he rocked from side to side in his armchair, as the passing-bell told the tale of death. Mr. Marvedi had, for thirty years, dwelt in a house far removed from

> —the sound of the church-going bell;

when it pleased the functionaries vested with that solemn power to build within a few furlongs of his residence a sacred temple. Marvedi, rarely stirring from his house, was altogether ignorant of the goodly work until the bell assured him it was done. The miser was immediately resolved; he would flee from the spot; he would bury himself where his ears should not receive the horrid warning. Some preparation was, however, necessary; and, in the meantime, he was tortured almost daily by the knell of death. He would sit and gasp in the silence; and, with his bony hands, clutch the arms of his chair; and his eyes would wander round the room as if watching something; and then he would try to smile, when the bell would seem to strike upon his heart, and he would shrink like a slave from the uplifted scourge. It was a frightful sight to see the old man thus, with his sinful soul bare in his face. He would sit, and, until the bell ceased, howl and mutter: "Another! and rich, they say, with half a million, perhaps, and to die. Lord, Lord! to lose all, to be no longer prayed to, to enjoy no more law, but to be nailed up, thrust into a hole, and then the judgment!" and here his locked hands would shake as with a palsy, and his speechless lips would move, and he would sit possessed by his conscience.

It was little more than an hour after one of these fits of Marvedi that Mr. Hopely, the doctor, made his morning call. We must, however, premise that his visits were ostensibly paid to Miss Fanny, the rich man's niece, Marvedi never consenting to believe that he himself was in want of medical advice, though every day he indirectly obtained it from his professional visitor. In this delusion he obstinately remained to the last, dying in the end, with only the most delicate hint on the part of Hopely, of his probable indisposition. When Marvedi was *in articulo mortis* Hopely allowed that he might be a little poorly.

"Good morning, Mr. Marvedi; good morning, sir. Ha, ha! never saw you looking better," said the courageous Mr. Hopely, staring in the slate-coloured face of the miser, and then pursing his mouth and raising his eyebrows as he caught the eye of Fanny.

"Do you think so, Mr. Hopely? Do you really think so?" cried Marvedi, whiningly, wishing to be cheated.

"Think so! why you're like an oak, Mr. Marvedi: a handful of winters is nothing to you. And your pulse"—Marvedi was about to twitch his wrist from the hand of the lecturer—"delightful!" Marvedi held his wrist still; "so regular, so sound; the music of robust health. I have no doubt, at your age, Nestor had exactly the same pulse."

"Who was he?" asked the unlettered Plutus.

"Who? oh, an extraordinary man, lived a long time ago, but didn't die till he was six hundred," said Hopely, at a venture.

"Ha! the world has sadly changed, Mr. Hopely. Life was something in the time of Methuselah," sighed Marvedi.

"The truth is, Mr. Marvedi, men insist upon killing themselves; otherwise, and I am religiously persuaded of the fact, any man beginning with a fine constitution, a constitution like your own, for instance," Marvedi cleared his throat, and tried to straighten his back, "might live to be a thousand. All depended upon a wise temperance."

"I was never a glutton," interrupted Marvedi, folding his hands upon his breast.

"A wise temperance and a skilful doctor; not, understand me, to debilitate with drugs, but to sweeten the juices, to comfort with cordials. By the way, I have given the Arabian elixir to Fanny—three times a day, as before. There is nothing like temperance for long life. Look at Thomas Parr; bless me! it's very odd I never remarked it before, you bear a great resemblance to the picture of Parr."

"What! old Parr?" asked Marvedi, with a grim smile.

"The same; the man who lived to upwards of a hundred and fifty-two. Let me consider; yes, he saw out ten kings and queens."

"I have seen out three," said Marvedi.

"Then you have seven more to come," said the precise and encouraging apothecary. "Very singular that I should not remark it before! Yes; the general expression of the head—the ample forehead, and the great power indicated in the jaw. I have no doubt, were a comparison possible, that you and he would be found——"

"What have you there, Fanny?" suddenly asked the counterpart of Thomas Parr.

"Oh! a present from Mr. Hopely," said the niece, fondling a parrot, which, we may as well inform the reader, was the bird of ill-omen banished, for its untimely truths, from the house of the law-maker. Mr. Hopely purchased it of a Jew, with whom Mrs. Phocion had exchanged it for a figure in Nankin china.

"Parrots!" exclaimed Marvedi, leering discontent.

"Oh! a charming bird, uncle: sings all sorts of lively tunes," such ran the warranty of the Jew, "and whistles, 'Life let us cherish' like a Christian." The cheerfulness of the parrot's taste was not lost upon the man of wealth, who tacitly admitted the bird to his hospitality.

"It's not a squalling, shrieking, noisy wretch, with nothing to say for itself, but, as I am assured, a bird of capital education. You'll find it quite a companion to you; and as it is very young, and parrots live to a great age, I'm sure," and here Mr. Hopely took his hat, and shook Marvedi's hand, "I'm sure you'll—extraordinary pulse! admirable pulse!—you'll be fast friends for the next fifty years." Saying which Mr. Hopely and Fanny quitted the room to enjoy a conversation in which, doubtless, the health of Mr. Marvedi formed the principal subject.

Days passed on and not a word was spoken, not a note whistled by the parrot. Like a prudent alderman, it filled its belly without saying anything. It was a cold, blustering night in December when Mr. Marvedi sat in his room—a room not to be approached by the profane of his household under the heaviest penalty. The apartment was almost filled with chests, bronzes, and pictures. There was an antique cabinet, studded and clasped with finely-wrought brass, containing a vast treasure in *vertù* and jewels. From this Marvedi had taken several cases of diamonds, and now sat gloating over their light, made more piercingly brilliant by the gloom of the muchthrift's den. He sat and passed his fingers over the gems, and, as if communing with sensible objects, in the imbecility of his soul, chuckled and prattled to them. "What! leave you! no, no, no! never, never! My darlings! my pretty ones!" and the miser pressed the diamonds to his blue lips. "Ha! ha! let kings keep their fighting-men. Are not these the best of guards, the surest defenders, which no treason can corrupt, no rebellion debase; which, banished from one land, lose nothing by their exile? Ha! ha!" and Marvedi clapped his hands at the jewels and the heaps of gold before him. "These, these are the old man's valiant body-guard, his truest soldiers! I feel stronger as I look at 'em. Hopely was right; I have many, many years to come; tut! I am but sixty-five; many, many years—"

"*Going!*" rang a high passionless voice through the room.

"Ha!" cried the man of gold; and his fingers, like the claws of a vulture, instinctively pounced upon the jewels.

"*Going at sixty-five!*" was uttered in the same high, measured tones.

Marvedi could not speak. He lay with his breast on the table, and his arm stretched around his treasure. Years seemed to fall upon him in moments; his whole frame was shrunk together, and his heart beat as though it would beat through. As he lay thus, sprawling and fixed with horror, his eyes burned and dilated like the eyes of a maimed tiger, and his rigid mouth gaped as with the last breath. In truth, there was something in the voice and words of the unseen speaker to make the boldest start. Marvedi lay and listened for the voice, though ready to yield up the ghost, should it speak again. How long he really listened he knew not; though but a few minutes, it seemed to him a long, long night of horror. The place, gloomy before, to his imagination became darker and darker, and fantastic shadows seemed to creep about the wall. The arms of his chair appeared to grow close to his sides, and he sat fixed as in a trap. All was silent. Marvedi, casting his eyes around, ventured to move a hand; then, hardly breathing, lifted his head, drew up a leg, and thus, by fearful degrees, again gathered himself upright in his chair, and dared to move his head from side to side. He saw nothing, listened with new courage: heard nothing. He wiped the sweat from his forehead, and uttered a deep groan.

The next morning Mr. Marvedi, with him an unusual occurrence, took his breakfast in bed. Nay, he had not risen when Hopely called to see Fanny. "Excuse me, but couldn't leave the house without saying good morning," said the daily comforter, as he put aside the curtain. "Ha! humph! I'm glad to see you looking so well," added Hopely, with unconscious hesitation.

"Well!" cried Marvedi; "do you really think I look well, Mr. Hopely?" There was death in every line of his face.

"A little, little paler; but perhaps you haven't had so much sleep to-night?"

"Not a wink; not a wink!" rattled from the throat of the man of money.

"Ha! that accounts for it. Yes, yes; well, a nap after dinner and——" and here Hopely looked at Fanny.

"You mean well, Mr. Hopely; but oh, Lord! oh, Lord! last night; oh, I fear I'm—yes—I'm certainly—"

"*Going!*" cried the warning voice of the previous night.

"There—there—there—again—again!" shrieked Marvedi, and the bed shook beneath him.

"*For the last time, going!*" cried the parrot, perched on the tester of the bed; for the bird, being extremely tame, had the free run of the house, which may account for its having the night before hopped unseen into the sanctum of the miser.

Marvedi raved, "Don't you hear it? I'm called; a spirit calls me!"

"Compose yourself, my dear sir; pray compose yourself. Why—ha! ha!—it's only Fanny's parrot," said Hopely, in the softest tones.

Life seemed to return again to the features of the sick man, the mystery of the previous warning being so clearly made out. "Oh! ha! the bird you gave to Fanny, the parrot, to be my companion; thank you, Mr. Hopely, thank you!" said Marvedi, with a grim, malicious smile. "But away with it! kill it! wring its neck! out of doors with it!"

"To be sure, sir; to be sure," said Hopely, in vain attempting to secure the parrot, that flew from place to place, exclaiming, and always in a shriller tone, "*Going, going at sixty-five; ha! ha! decidedly going, going, going!*" whilst Marvedi roared and raved for the death or expulsion of the truth-teller. At length, Hopely, irritated by the successful movements of the bird, and urged by the cries of the sick man, flung his walking-cane at the parrot, and brought it to the floor, though, we are pained to say, with a broken leg. The martyr to truth was again banished for its folly.

It was the midnight of the third day after the above-named occurrence, and Hopely, Fanny, and the housekeeper, stood about the bed of Laurence Marvedi. His doom was fixed; despite the flatteries of the apothecary, death stood sentinel at the sick man's door. "I think I'm getting ill," said the dying man.

"Possibly, possibly, you may think so; but you're going on admirably," pronounced the equivocating Hopely.

"I should like to turn upon this side," said the patient, feebly.

"There, sir; there," said Hopely, who, with the housekeeper, assisted the sick man. "There, now, I'm sure you'll be better."

He *was* better; he was dead.

The apothecary found himself down in the will of the miser for a handsome legacy. Our truth-teller had a broken leg.

CHAPTER III

A VERY select party was congregated in the house of Mrs. Limetwig to celebrate the birthday of her daughter, the youngest of four, the fair Belinda, who, at the time we write, had entered into her nineteenth year, and although she had no fortune, at least what is vulgarly understood by the mercenary young men of our day as fortune, she had the nobler kind of wealth in great abundance—she was accomplished to the verge of perfection. Her pineapples painted on white satin were equal, if not superior, to any in Covent Garden. And then her portraits of dear and particular friends, they lived and looked! It was only known to a few, that she had contributed some of the fancy heads to either the Bloomsbury or the Bagnigge Wells' Beauties, we forget which. Her modesty withheld her name, but they who had seen one of her faces could easily point out the whole gallery. They had all the same sweet, small mouth, in which the artist finely indicated the ethereal nature of the heroine, showing that with such a mouth it was impossible to eat. A mouth, if we may dare even to approach a masculine simile, almost the size of a shirt button-hole; indeed, when any of the teeth were seen it might almost be doubted if they were not the pearl button itself. And then the Dian-like purity illustrated in such little lips! they might, with difficulty, compass a whistle, but could never be brought to perpetrate a kiss. The eyes were worthy of the lips, nice little beads, looking up in one head and down in another, as, in obedience to a wire, we see the different orbs of different dolls. And then the flesh, and the general expression of the face, so soft, so very sweet, so unlike the flesh that on this dull earth is wooed and won and taken before a parson: no, it is clear such beauties live upon honey-dew like humming-birds; on conserves of roses and jessamine paste. They are a great improvement on the ideal woman of Wordsworth, and are

—*much* too good
For human nature's daily food.

It may be thought that we have lingered too long on the one ability of Belinda, seeing that she had so many, but we could not for the life of us let the reader pass in ignorance of the fair hand so successfully helping the advancement of high British art. We have paused—many a time have we paused—before these heads, contemplating them with the same profound sense of the beautiful that in our schoolboy days we have lavished upon sugar-plums; nay, it may be wrong to own the weakness, but, perhaps, with the self-same wish. To return to the birthday party.

We never see a young lady, surrounded by eight or ten bachelors, take off her gloves, and seat herself at the piano, but we shudder, from an association of ideas; yes, we instantly think of the infernal machine. Who knows how many men may be killed dead on the spot by the first crash! Belinda played divinely. Edgar Flimsy, the younger son of a country banker, looked very serious as the music proceeded. Mrs. Limetwig observed the gravity of the young gentleman, and doubtless to divert it, desired Belinda to sing. Belinda obeyed, and sang in the finest possible taste. Had she been wound up for the occasion like a musical snuff-box, she could not have acquitted herself with more precision, and with less vulgar impulse! Every note fell from her lips as if it were chiselled; and then her execution! Poor Edgar Flimsy!—his heart was dragged up and down the gamut until exhausted, when, at the last three-minute shake of the songstress, it fell into a thousand little pieces. Indeed, we would not own the heart that could stand that shake. There was a general burst of applause, followed for a moment by a profound silence. Mrs. Limetwig looked proudly at the young bachelors, but favoured the younger son of the banker with a look entirely for himself.

In this pause a voice cried out, and it seemed as if accompanying the glances of Mrs. Limetwig: *"Does nobody offer?"*

A titter, deepening into a laugh, went round the room, and Mrs. Limetwig and Belinda turned to scarlet. "Oh—ha! ha!" observed the mamma, evidently restraining excessive laughter, "that teasing bird, which William's godfather brought him; how came it here?" and the servant was immediately ordered to secure the intruder: but the parrot was a social parrot, and resolved not to leave the party; hence, after many ineffectual attempts to catch it, for its leg, though weak, had been set by some Samaritan, the bird was suffered to remain.

"It was downright cruelty to ask, but would"—thus spoke the banker's younger son—"would Miss Limetwig sing his favourite song—the——"

"Certainly," answered Mrs. Limetwig for her daughter; and the favourite song—we forget its title and words, but its being very popular may account for that—was executed with incomparable power.

"Your only unmarried daughter!" observed the banker's son, in a low voice, to Mrs. Limetwig.

"All married, except my dear Belinda; and it would break my heart, I believe, to part with her. Yes, sir," said the mother, affected even by the probability of a separation, "Belinda, sir, is—is——"

"The last lot, gentlemen—the last lot!" cried the parrot; and the guests burst into uncontrolled laughter. Belinda, with fine presence of mind, immediately struck the keys of the piano, as though quite unconscious of the interruption, and in a minute or two was in the midst of a furious battle piece.

"If I might aspire to the notice of Miss Limetwig," said the banker's son to the mother, "I hope that——"

"Going for a song, gentlemen!" cried the parrot; and again its words were greeted with a shout. "It was too much; the creature—where could it have learned such words?—should be sent from the house." Such was the sentence pronounced by Mrs. Limetwig, and, after some little difficulty carried into execution. But the charm of the night was broken: Mrs. Limetwig was irritated, Belinda languid, and the banker's son—whether the last declaration of the bird had "given him pause," we know not—not once, for the remainder of the evening, ventured to speak of Belinda. She died a maid, a victim to the intrusion of truth.

What would become of the world, if truth interfered in every marriage?

CHAPTER IV

The parrot was now doomed to feel, in disgrace and poverty, the imprudence of the past. It had suffered for too much truth. Untoward accidents had placed it in situations where its foible had told with fatal effect on the sensibility of its patrons. It was now, however, housed where truth might be spoken; at least, so it will be thought, when we make known the next lodging of our martyr. In smoky, squalid huts, surely truth may show its nakedness, and utter its rough, but unwholesome sayings.

Jerry Noggin was kept a cobbler by the bottle. Could he have withstood its witcheries, he might, whenever he pleased, have asserted the full dignity of shoemaker; yes, he might have been the author of boots, instead of the ignoble translator. For twenty years had his wife rated him for his prostituted genius, for suffering "any vampire to get above his head," when, if he liked, he might have made shoes for the king. Jerry, in his serious moments—that is, when he had no money—allowed the justice of the reproach, and as constantly promised no longer to deserve it.

"Ha! Lord help me! I was well put to it to marry you!" exclaimed Mrs. Noggin, in the course of one of those little disputes that give a zest and flavour to matrimony.

"To be sure you were," said Jerry, and his words smacked of the bar at the corner: "to be sure; all the parish knew that."

"What! I might have married a gentleman," retorted Mrs. Noggin.

"And so you have," said Jerry, with a smug look of dignity.

"A gentleman! A fellow that does nothing but sot upon gin and——"

"That's not my fault, but my misfortune," cried Noggin, somewhat affected. "Don't reproach me, Nelly, if—if——" and the maudlin cobbler began to weep, "if I can't get brandy! Don't talk to me; what matter how a man gets at happiness, so he does but have it?"

"Happiness! and have you the impudence to call yourself happy?" exclaimed the wife; and, considering that she was his wife, his avowal of felicity betokened great moral courage.

Noggin evidently felt the absurdity of the bravado; for, looking up in his wife's face, and puffing out his cheeks like the cheeks of an ape, he hiccuped: "Sometimes, in the skittle-ground."

"And there you find happiness?" cried Mrs. Noggin, with supreme contempt.

"Yes," said Jerry, qualifying his assertion, "when you've the rheumatiz."

"And I have wasted the bloom of my youth——"

"Bloom! tan," said Jerry, "tan."

"How many women would have left you, you villain?" shouted Mrs. Noggin, stung by the sneer at her beauty.

"Ha! I've often thought that," said Jerry; "if I had but known how to go to work."

"What! you want to get rid of me?" and the shame-stricken husband did not venture to deny the enormity. "Of me, who could have picked and chosen where I liked? of me——"

"Now, I say, Nell, let's have no more of this. Pick and choose! I say nothing; you're my wife, and I hope God will forgive me; but you know, Nell, as for picking and choosing," and here Mr. Noggin, with the end of his thumb placed at the end of his nose, indicated some deep, mystic meaning.

Mrs. Noggin, enraged at the gesture, screamed in treble, "Why, you pitiful, dirty villain; you miserable rascal, that I have kept from being naked; you ungrateful fellow, that I nursed with a broken arm——" Mrs. Noggin did not pause to say how it had been broken—"do you dare to mean to say that I couldn't have married the miller—and the——"

"Why, Nell, you know it——" and Noggin could sometimes be stern in his liquor; "you know that when I married you, you know that you were going a-begging!"

"Going a-begging!" roared Mrs. Noggin, placing her hands at her sides.

"Yes, going a-begging; you were——"

"Cheap as dirt!" cried the parrot, from the top of a wicker cage, the residence of a late magpie; *"cheap as dirt!"* repeated the bird.

Mrs. Noggin was for an instant struck dumb by the untimely truth of such a speaker. Jerry, recovering his astonishment, slapped his thigh, shouted a laugh, and said, "That's a bit of truth."

"Cheap as dirt—cheap as dirt—cheap as dirt!" iterated the parrot, as though proud of the praise of the husband.

"And it isn't enough that you, a villain and a coward as you are, wear out my life, but you must teach a parrot to——"

"Cheap as dirt!" cried the bird. It spoke no more; for Mrs. Noggin, seizing a last, with amazing force and dexterity flung it at the speaker, and the parrot fell dead upon the floor.

Even in the garret of a cobbler there was no retreat for truth.

Silly, silly bird! had it lived a life of self-glorification, how differently had its life been passed. "I cannot think," said the parrot, one day, to a fine macaw in a gold burnished cage; "I cannot think," said our sufferer, the spirit of Æsop for a brief minute descending on the birds, "how it is that I meet with nothing but persecution and misfortune. I talk whole sentences, and might reasonably expect great admiration for my sagacity; and yet look at me; see, what a poor plucked, maimed vagrant I am! How is it, my dear macaw, that you have for so many years enjoyed uninterrupted luxury? Surely you must have an extraordinary gift of words. Tell me, how is this? are you continually letting fall rich truths—for ever dealing in deep wisdom?"

"Not I," said the macaw, "I have lived here these ten years, and have been pampered on the best; and yet, until this hour, I have never said anything from noon till night except *'Pretty Poll!'* "

CHAPTER V

This will be a very short chapter; but to the admirers of martyred worth, we trust a very grateful one. Lord Shaftesbury assures us that no man of genius starves unknown; his starvation, probably, helping to make him notorious. Even truth has, at last, enduring reward.

Lady —— had the most splendid collection of all that was "rich and rare." Happy were they admitted to the wonders of her museum! "And, pray, what have we here?" asked a foreign countess, pausing before our stuffed parrot—a parrot with its every feather composed, its eye replaced, set up in an erect and self-asserting posture, standing beneath a dome of glass, and supported by a pillar of most exquisite marble, whereon were inscribed in letters of gold the history, acts, and death of a martyr.

The parrot had, in its life, been blinded, maimed; had been hunted from place to place with hate and curses following it, and had at last been brained by a shrew for the truth in a cobbler's garret. But dead, its fame began to live; and now it stands in a palace upon marble, and is sheltered from the smallest mote by a case of crystal!

What are the trials of truth, when we think of its monuments?

LORD LYTTON

(1803–1873)

EDWARD GEORGE BULWER, first Baron Lytton, was a man of great versatility: he was novelist, playwright, and statesman. His first novel was *Falkland* (1827); but it was the next, *Pelham* (1828), that brought him popularity. This was soon followed by *Eugene Aram* (1832) and similar works of "the Newgate School of Fiction," which were widely read. Then came a series of historical novels, such as *The Last Days of Pompeii* (1834), *Rienzi* (1835), and *The Last of the Barons* (1843). In later life, he completely changed his style, and perhaps his best book is *The Caxtons* (1850), in which the influence of Sterne is very clearly to be discerned. He won his spurs as a dramatist with *The Lady of Lyons* (1838) and *Money* (1840). He entered the House of Commons in 1831, was Colonial Secretary 1858–9, and was raised to the Upper House in 1866.

THE HAUNTED AND THE HAUNTERS;

OR, THE HOUSE AND THE BRAIN

A FRIEND of mine, who is a man of letters and a philosopher, said to me one day, as if between jest and earnest: "Fancy! since we last met, I have discovered a haunted house in the midst of London."

"Really haunted?—and by what?—ghosts?"

"Well, I can't answer that question; all I know is this: six weeks ago my wife and I were in search of a furnished apartment. Passing a quiet street, we saw on the window of one of the houses a bill, 'Apartments, Furnished.' The situation suited us: we entered the house—liked the rooms—engaged them by the week—and left them the third day. No power on earth could have reconciled my wife to stay longer; and I don't wonder at it."

"What did you see?"

"Excuse me—I have no desire to be ridiculed as a superstitious dreamer—nor, on the other hand, could I ask you to accept on my affirmation what you would hold to be incredible without the evidence of your own senses. Let me only say this, it was not so much what we saw or heard (in which you might fairly suppose that we were the dupes of our own excited fancy, or the victims of imposture in others) that drove us away, as it was an undefinable terror which seized both of us whenever we passed by the door of a certain unfurnished room, in which we neither saw nor heard anything. And the strangest marvel of all was, that for once in my life I agreed with my wife, silly woman though she be—and allowed, after the third night, that it was impossible to stay a fourth in that house. Accordingly, on the fourth morning I summoned the woman who kept the house and attended on us, and told her that the rooms did not quite suit us, and we would not stay out our week. She said, dryly: 'I know why; you have stayed longer than any other lodger. Few ever stayed a second night; none before you a third. But I take it they have been very kind to you.'

"'They—who?' I asked, affecting to smile.

"'Why, they who haunt the house, whoever they are. I don't mind them; I remember them many years ago, when I lived in this house, not as a servant; but I know they will be the death of me some day. I don't care—I'm old, and must die soon anyhow; and then I shall be with them, and in this house still.' The woman spoke with so dreary a calmness, that really it was a sort of awe that prevented my conversing with her further. I paid for my week, and too happy were my wife and I to get off so cheaply."

"You excite my curiosity," said I; "nothing I should like better than to sleep in a haunted house. Pray give me the address of the one which you left so ignominiously."

My friend gave me the address; and when we parted, I walked straight towards the house thus indicated.

It is situated on the north side of Oxford Street, in a dull but respectable thoroughfare. I found the house shut up—no bill at the window, and no response to my knock. As I was turning away, a beer-boy, collecting pewter pots at the neighbouring areas, said to me: "Do you want anyone at that house, sir?"

"Yes, I heard it was to be let."

"Let!—why, the woman who kept it is dead—has been dead these three weeks, and no one can be found to stay there, though Mr. J—— offered ever so much. He offered mother, who chars for him, 1*l.* a week just to open and shut the windows, and she would not."

"Would not!—and why?"

"The house is haunted; and the old woman who kept it was found dead in her bed, with her eyes wide open. They say the devil strangled her."

"Pooh!—you speak of Mr. J——. Is he the owner of the house?"

"Yes."

"Where does he live?"

"In G—— Street, No. —."

"What is he?—in any business?"

"No, sir—nothing particular; a single gentleman."

I gave the pot-boy the gratuity earned by his liberal information, and proceeded to Mr. J——, in G—— Street, which was close by the street that boasted the haunted house. I was lucky enough to find Mr. J—— at home—an elderly man, with intelligent countenance and prepossessing manners.

I communicated my name and my business frankly. I said I heard the house was considered to be haunted—that I had a strong desire to examine a house with so equivocal a reputation—that I should be greatly obliged if he would allow me to hire it, though only for a night. I was willing to pay for that privilege whatever he might be inclined to ask. "Sir," said Mr. J——, with great courtesy, "the house is at your service, for as short or as long a time as you please. Rent is out of the question—the obligation will be on my side should you be able to discover the cause of the strange phenomena which at present deprive it of all value. I cannot let it, for I cannot even get a servant to keep it in order or answer the door. Unluckily the house is haunted, if I may use that expression, not only by night, but by day; though at night the disturbances are of a more unpleasant and sometimes of a more alarming character. The poor old woman who died in it three weeks ago was a pauper whom I took out of a workhouse, for in her childhood she had been known to some of my family, and had once been in such good circumstances that she had rented that house of my uncle. She was a woman of superior education and strong mind, and was the only person I could ever induce to remain in the house. Indeed, since her death, which was sudden, and the coroner's inquest, which gave it a notoriety in the neighbourhood, I have so despaired of finding any person to take charge of the house, much more a tenant, that I would willingly let it rent free for a year to anyone who would pay its rates and taxes."

"How long is it since the house acquired this sinister character?"

"That I can scarcely tell you, but very many years since. The old woman I spoke of said it was haunted when she rented it between thirty and forty years ago. The fact is, that my life has been spent in the East Indies, and in the civil service of the Company. I returned to England last year, on inheriting the fortune of an uncle, among whose possessions was the house in question. I found it shut up and uninhabited. I was told that it was haunted, that no one would inhabit it. I smiled at what seemed to me so idle a story. I spent some money in repairing it—added to its old-fashioned furniture a few modern articles—advertised it, and obtained a lodger for a year. He was a colonel on half-pay. He came in with his family, a son and a daughter, and four or five servants: they all left the house the next day; and, although each of them declared that he had seen something different from that which had scared the others, a something still was equally terrible to all. I really could not in conscience sue, nor even blame, the colonel for breach of agreement. Then I put in the old woman I have spoken of, and she was empowered to let the house in apartments. I never had one lodger who stayed more than three days. I do not tell you their stories—to no two lodgers have there been exactly the same phenomena repeated. It is better that you should judge for yourself, than enter the house with an imagination influenced by previous narratives; only be prepared to see and to hear something or other, and take whatever precautions you yourself please."

"Have you never had a curiosity yourself to pass a night in that house?"

"Yes. I passed not a night, but three hours in broad daylight in that house. My curiosity is not satisfied, but it is quenched. I have no desire to renew the experiment. You cannot complain, you see, sir, that I am not sufficiently candid; and unless your interest be exceedingly eager and your nerves unusually strong, I honestly add, that I advise you *not* to pass a night in that house."

"My interest *is* exceedingly keen," said I, "and though only a coward will boast of his nerves in situations wholly unfamiliar to him, yet my nerves have been seasoned in such variety of danger that I have the right to rely on them—even in a haunted house."

Mr. J—— said very little more; he took the keys of the house out of his bureau, gave them to me—and, thanking him cordially for his frankness, and his urbane concession to my wish, I carried off my prize.

Impatient for the experiment, as soon as I reached home, I summoned my confidential servant—a young man of gay spirits, fearless temper, and as free from superstitious prejudice as anyone I could think of.

"F——," said I, "you remember in Germany how disappointed we were at not finding a ghost in that old castle, which was said to be haunted by a headless apparition? Well, I have heard of a house in London which, I have reason to hope, is decidedly haunted. I mean to sleep there to-night. From what I hear, there is no doubt that something will allow itself to be seen or to be heard—something, perhaps, excessively horrible. Do you think, if I take you with me, I may rely on your presence of mind, whatever may happen?"

"Oh, sir! pray trust me," answered F——, grinning with delight.

"Very well; then here are the keys of the house—this is the address. Go now,—select for me any bedroom you please; and since the house has not been inhabited for weeks, make up a good fire—air the bed well—see, of course, that there are candles as well as fuel. Take with you my revolver and my dagger—so much for my weapons—arm yourself equally well; and if we are not a match for a dozen ghosts, we shall be but a sorry couple of Englishmen."

I was engaged for the rest of the day on business so urgent that I had not leisure to think much on the nocturnal adventure to which I had plighted my honour. I dined alone, and very late, and while dining, read, as is my habit. I selected one of the volumes of Macaulay's essays. I thought to myself that I would take the book with me; there was so much of healthfulness in the style, and practical life in the subjects, that it would serve as an antidote against the influences of superstitious fancy.

Accordingly, about half-past nine, I put the book into my pocket, and strolled leisurely towards the haunted house. I took with me a favourite dog—an exceedingly sharp, bold, and vigilant bull-terrier—a dog fond of prowling about strange ghostly corners and passages at night in search of rats—a dog of dogs for a ghost.

It was a summer night, but chilly, the sky somewhat gloomy and overcast. Still there was a moon—faint and sickly, but still a moon—and if the clouds permitted, after midnight it would be brighter.

I reached the house, knocked, and my servant opened with a cheerful smile.

"All right, sir, and very comfortable."

"Oh!" said I, rather disappointed; "have you not seen nor heard anything remarkable?"

"Well, sir, I must own I have heard something queer."

"What?—what?"

"The sound of feet pattering behind me; and once or twice small noises like whispers close at my ear—nothing more."

"You are not at all frightened?"

"I! not a bit of it, sir"; and the man's bold look reassured me on one point—viz., that happen what might, he would not desert me.

We were in the hall, the street-door closed, and my attention was now drawn to my dog. He had at first run in eagerly enough, but had sneaked back to the door, and was scratching and whining to get out. After patting him on the head, and encouraging him gently, the dog seemed to reconcile himself to the situation, and followed me and F—— through the house, but keeping close at my heels instead of hurrying inquisitively in advance, which was his usual and normal habit in all strange places. We first visited the subterranean apartments, the kitchen and other offices, and especially the cellars, in which last there were two or three bottles of wine still left in the bin, covered with cobwebs, and evidently, by their appearance, undisturbed for many years. It was clear that the ghosts were not wine-bibbers. For the rest we discovered nothing of interest. There was a gloomy little back-yard, with very high walls. The stones of this yard were very damp; and what with the damp, and what with the dust and smoke-grime on the pavement, our feet left a slight impression where we passed. And now appeared the first strange phenomenon witnessed by myself in this strange abode. I saw, just before me, the print of a foot suddenly form itself, as it were. I stopped, caught hold of my servant, and pointed to it. In advance of that footprint as suddenly dropped another. We both saw it. I advanced quickly to the place; the footprint kept advancing before me, a small footprint—the foot of a child: the impression was too faint thoroughly to distinguish the shape, but it seemed to us both that it was the print of a naked foot. This phenomenon ceased when we arrived at the opposite wall, nor did it repeat itself on returning. We remounted the stairs, and entered the rooms on the ground floor, a dining parlour, a small back-parlour, and a still smaller third room that had been probably appropriated to a footman—all still as death. We then visited the drawing-rooms, which seemed fresh and new. In the front room I seated myself in an arm-chair. F—— placed on the table the candlestick with which he had lighted us. I told him to shut the door. As he turned to do so, a chair opposite to me moved from the wall quickly and noiselessly, and dropped itself about a yard from my own chair, immediately fronting it.

"Why, this is better than the turning-tables," said I, with a half-laugh; and as I laughed, my dog put back his head and howled.

F——, coming back, had not observed the movement of the chair. He employed himself now in stilling the dog. I continued to gaze on the chair, and fancied I saw on it a pale blue misty outline of a human figure, but an outline so indistinct that I could only distrust my own vision. The dog now was quiet.

"Put back that chair opposite to me," said I to F——; "put it back to the wall."

F—— obeyed. "Was that you, sir," said he, turning abruptly.

"I!—what?"

"Why, something struck me. I felt it sharply on the shoulder—just here."

"No," said I. "But we have jugglers present, and though we may not discover their tricks, we shall catch *them* before they frighten *us*."

We did not stay long in the drawing-rooms—in fact, they felt so damp and so chilly that I was glad to get to the fire upstairs. We locked the doors of the drawing-rooms—a precaution which, I should observe, we had taken with all the rooms we had searched below. The bedroom my servant had selected for me was the best on the floor—a large one, with two windows fronting the street. The four-posted bed, which took up no inconsiderable space, was opposite to the fire, which burnt clear and bright; a door in the wall to the left, between the bed and the window, communicated with the room which my servant appropriated to himself. This last was a small room with a sofa-bed, and had no communication with the landing-place—no other door but that which conducted to the bedroom I was to occupy. On either side of my fireplace was a cupboard, without locks, flush with the wall, and covered with the same dull-brown paper. We examined these cupboards—only hooks to suspend female dresses—nothing else; we sounded the walls—evidently solid—the outer walls of the building. Having finished the survey of these apartments, warmed myself a few moments, and lighted my cigar, I then, still accompanied by F——, went forth to complete my reconnoitre. In the landing-place there was another door; it was closed firmly. "Sir," said my servant, in surprise, "I unlocked this door with all the others when I first came; it cannot have got locked from the inside, for——"

Before he had finished his sentence, the door, which neither of us then was touching, opened quietly of itself. We looked at each other a single instant. The same thought seized both—some human agency might be detected here. I rushed in first, my servant followed. A small blank dreary room without furniture—a few empty boxes and hampers in a corner—a small window—the shutters closed—not even a fireplace—no other door but that by which we had entered—no carpet on the floor, and the floor seemed very old, uneven, worm-eaten, mended here and there, as was shown by the whiter patches on the wood; but no living being, and no visible place in which a living being could have hidden. As we stood gazing round, the door by which we had entered closed as quietly as it had before opened: we were imprisoned.

For the first time I felt a creep of undefinable horror. Not so my servant. "Why, they don't think to trap us, sir; I could break that trumpery door with a kick of my foot."

"Try first if it will open to your hand," said I, shaking off the vague apprehension that had seized me, "while I unclose the shutters and see what is without."

I unbarred the shutters—the window looked on the little back-yard I have before described; there was no ledge without—nothing to break the sheer descent of the wall. No man getting out of that window would have found any footing till he had fallen on the stones below.

F——, meanwhile, was vainly attempting to open the door. He now turned round to me and asked my permission to use force. And I should here state, in justice to the servant, that, far from evincing any superstitious terrors, his nerve, composure, and even gaiety amidst circumstances so extraordinary, compelled my admiration, and made me congratulate myself on having secured a companion in every way fitted to the occasion. I willingly gave him the permission he required. But though he was a remarkably strong man, his force was as idle as his milder efforts; the door did not even shake to his stoutest kick. Breathless and panting, he desisted. I then tried the door myself, equally in vain. As I ceased from the effort, again that creep of horror came over me; but this time it was more cold and stubborn. I felt as if some strange and ghastly exhalation were rising up from the chinks of that rugged floor, and filling the atmosphere with a venomous influence hostile to human life. The door now very slowly and quietly opened as of its own accord. We precipitated ourselves into the landing-place. We both saw a large pale light—as large as the human figure, but shapeless and unsubstantial—move before us, and ascend the stairs that led from the landing into the attics. I followed the light, and my servant followed me. It entered to the right of the landing, a small garret, of which the door stood open. I entered in the same instant. The light then collapsed into a small globule, exceedingly brilliant and vivid: rested a moment on a bed in the corner, quivered, and vanished. We approached the bed and examined it—a half-tester, such as is commonly found in attics devoted to servants. On the drawers that stood near it we perceived an old faded silk kerchief, with the needle still left in a rent half repaired. The kerchief was covered with dust; probably it had belonged to the old woman who had last died in that house, and this might have been her sleeping room. I had sufficient curiosity to open the drawers: there were a few odds and ends of female dress, and two letters tied round with a narrow ribbon of faded yellow. I took the liberty to possess myself of the letters. We found nothing else in the room worth noticing—nor did the light reappear; but we distinctly heard, as we turned to go, a pattering footfall on the floor—just before us. We went through the other attics (in all four), the footfall still preceding us. Nothing to be seen—nothing but the footfall heard. I had the letters in my hand: just as I was descending the stairs I distinctly felt my wrist seized, and a faint soft effort made to draw the letters from my clasp. I only held them the more tightly, and the effort ceased.

We regained the bed-chamber appropriated to myself, and I then remarked that my dog had not followed us when we had left it. He was thrusting himself close to the fire, and trembling. I was impatient to examine the letters; and while I read them, my servant opened a little box in which he had deposited the weapons I had ordered him to bring; took them out, placed them on a table close at my bed-head, and then occupied himself in soothing the dog, who, however, seemed to heed him very little.

The letters were short—they were dated; the dates exactly thirty-five years ago. They were evidently from a lover to his mistress, or a husband to some young wife. Not only the terms of expression, but a distinct reference to a former voyage, indicated the writer to have been a seafarer. The spelling and handwriting were those of a man imperfectly educated, but still the language itself was forcible. In the expressions of endearment there was a kind of rough wild love; but here and there were dark unintelligible hints at some secret not of love—some secret that seemed of crime. "We ought to love each other," was one of the sentences I remember, "for how everyone else would execrate us if all was known." Again: "Don't let anyone be in the same room with you at night—you talk in your sleep." And again: "What's done can't be undone; and I tell you there's nothing against us unless the dead could come to life." Here there was underlined in a better handwriting (a female's), "They do!" At the end of the letter latest in date the same female hand had written these words: "Lost at sea the 4th of June, the same day as——"

I put down the letters, and began to muse over their contents.

Fearing, however, that the train of thought into which I fell might unsteady my nerves, I fully determined to keep my mind in a fit state to cope with whatever of Marvellous the advancing night might bring forth. I roused myself—laid the letters on the table—stirred up the fire, which was still bright and cheering, and opened my volume of Macaulay. I read quietly enough till about half-past eleven. I then threw myself dressed upon the bed, and told my servant he might retire to his own room, but must keep himself awake. I bade him leave open the door between the two rooms. Thus alone, I kept two candles burning on the table by my bed-head. I placed my watch beside the weapons, and calmly resumed my Macaulay. Opposite to me the fire burned clear; and on the hearth-rug, seemingly asleep, lay the dog. In about twenty minutes I felt an exceedingly cold air pass by my cheek, like a sudden draught. I fancied the door to my right, communicating with the landing-place, must have got open; but no—it was closed. I then turned my glance to my left, and saw the flame of the candles violently swayed as by a wind. At the same moment the watch beside the revolver softly slid from the table—softly, softly—no visible hand—it was gone. I sprang up, seizing the revolver with the one hand, the dagger with the other: I was not willing that my weapons should share the fate of the watch. Thus armed, I looked round the floor—no sign of the watch. Three slow, loud, distinct knocks were now heard at the bed-head; my servant called out, "Is that you, sir?"

"No; be on your guard."

The dog now roused himself and sat on his haunches, his ears moving quickly backwards and forwards. He kept his eyes fixed on me with a look so strange that he concentred all my attention on himself. Slowly, he rose up, all his hair bristling, and stood perfectly rigid, and with the same wild stare. I had no time, however, to examine the dog. Presently my servant emerged from his room; and if ever I saw horror in the human face, it was then. I should not have recognised him had we met in the street, so altered was every lineament. He passed by me quickly, saying in a whisper that seemed scarcely to come from his lips, "Run—run! it is after me!" He gained the door to the landing, pulled it open, and rushed forth. I followed him into the landing involuntarily, calling him to stop; but, without heeding me, he bounded down the stairs, clinging to the balusters, and taking several steps at a time. I heard, where I stood, the street-door open—heard it again clap to. I was left alone in the haunted house.

It was but for a moment that I remained undecided whether or not to follow my servant; pride and curiosity alike forbade so dastardly a flight. I re-entered my room, closing the door after me, and proceeded cautiously into the interior chamber. I encountered nothing to justify my servant's terror. I again carefully examined the walls, to see if there were any concealed door. I could find no trace of one—not even a seam in the dull-brown paper with which the room was hung. How, then, had the THING, whatever it was, which had so scared him, obtained ingress except through my own chamber?

I returned to my room, shut and locked the door that opened upon the interior one, and stood on the hearth, expectant and prepared. I now perceived that the dog had slunk into an angle of the wall, and was pressing himself close against it, as if literally striving to force his way into it. I approached the animal and spoke to it; the poor brute was evidently beside itself with terror. It showed all its teeth, the slaver dropping from its jaws, and would certainly have bitten me if I had touched it. It did not seem to recognise me. Whoever has seen at the Zoological Gardens a rabbit, fascinated by a serpent, cowering in a corner, may form some idea of the anguish which the dog exhibited. Finding all efforts to soothe the animal in vain, and fearing that his bite might be as venomous in that state as in the madness of hydrophobia, I left him alone, placed my weapons on the table beside the fire, seated myself, and recommenced my Macaulay.

Perhaps, in order not to appear seeking credit for a courage, or rather a coolness which the reader may conceive I exaggerate, I may be pardoned if I pause to indulge in one or two egotistical remarks.

As I hold presence of mind, or what is called courage, to be precisely proportioned to familiarity with the circumstances that lead to it, so I should say that I had been long sufficiently familiar with all experiments that appertain to the Marvellous. I had witnessed many very extraordinary phenomena in various parts of the world—phenomena that would be either totally disbelieved if I stated them, or ascribed to supernatural agencies. Now, my theory is that the Supernatural is the Impossible, and that what is called supernatural is only a something in the laws of nature of which we have been hitherto ignorant. Therefore, if a ghost rise before me, I have not the right to say, "So, then, the supernatural is possible," but rather, "So, then, the apparition of a ghost is, contrary to received opinion, within the laws of nature—*i.e.*, not supernatural."

Now, in all that I had hitherto witnessed, and indeed in all the wonders which the amateurs of mystery in our age record as facts, a material living agency is always required. On the Continent you will find still magicians who assert that they can raise spirits. Assume for the moment that they assert truly, still the living material form of the magician is present; and he is the material agency by which, from some constitutional peculiarities, certain strange phenomena are represented to your natural senses.

Accept, again, as truthful, the tales of Spirit Manifestation in America—musical or other sounds—writings on paper, produced by no discernible hand—articles of furniture moved without apparent human agency—or the actual sight and touch of hands, to which no bodies seem to belong—still there must be found the MEDIUM or living being, with constitutional peculiarities capable of obtaining these signs. In fine, in all such marvels, supposing even that there is no imposture, there must be a human being like ourselves by whom, or through whom, the effects presented to human beings are produced. It is so with the now familiar phenomena of mesmerism or electro-biology; the mind of the person operated on is affected through a material living agent. Nor, supposing it true that a mesmerised patient can respond to the will or passes of a mesmeriser a hundred miles distant, is the response less occasioned by a material being; it may be through a material fluid—call it Electric, call it Odic, call it what you will—which has the power of traversing space and passing obstacles, that the material effect is communicated from one to the other. Hence all that I had hitherto witnessed, or expected to witness, in this strange house, I believed to be occasioned through some agency or medium as mortal as myself; and this idea necessarily prevented the awe with which those who regard as supernatural things that are not within the ordinary operations of nature, might have been impressed by the adventures of that memorable night.

As, then, it was my conjecture that all that was presented, or would be presented to my senses, must originate in some human being gifted by constitution with the power so to present them, and having some motive so to do, I felt an interest in my theory which, in its way, was rather philosophical than superstitious. And I can sincerely say that I was in as tranquil a temper for observation as any practical experimentalist could be in awaiting the effects of some rare, though perhaps perilous, chemical combination. Of course, the more I kept my mind detached from fancy, the more the temper fitted for observation would be obtained; and I therefore riveted eye and thought on the strong daylight sense in the page of my Macaulay.

I now became aware that something interposed between the page and the light—the page was overshadowed: I looked up, and I saw what I shall find it very difficult, perhaps impossible to describe.

It was a Darkness shaping itself forth from the air in very undefined outline. I cannot say it was of a human form, and yet it had more resemblance to a human form, or rather shadow, than to anything else. As it stood, wholly apart and distinct from the air and the light around it, its dimensions seemed gigantic, the summit nearly touching the ceiling. While I gazed, a feeling of intense cold seized me. An iceberg before me could not more have chilled me; nor could the cold of an iceberg have been more purely physical. I feel convinced that it was not the cold caused by fear. As I continued to gaze, I thought—but this I cannot say with precision—that I distinguished two eyes looking down on me from the height. One moment I fancied that I distinguished them clearly, the next they seemed gone; but still two rays of a pale-blue light frequently shot through the darkness, as from the height on which I half believed, half doubted, that I had encountered the eyes.

I strove to speak—my voice utterly failed me; I could only think to myself, "Is this fear? it is *not* fear!" I strove to rise—in vain; I felt as if weighed down by an irresistible force. Indeed, my impression was that of an immense and overwhelming Power opposed to my volition;—that sense of utter inadequacy to cope with a force beyond man's, which one may feel *physically* in a storm at sea, in a conflagration, or when confronting some terrible wild beast, or rather, perhaps, the shark of the ocean, I felt *morally*. Opposed to my will was another will, as far superior to its strength as storm, fire, and shark are superior in material force to the force of man.

And now, as this impression grew on me—now came, at last, horror—horror to a degree that no words can convey. Still I retained pride, if not courage; and in my own mind I said: "This is horror, but it is not fear; unless I fear I cannot be harmed; my reason rejects this thing; it is an illusion—I do not fear." With a violent effort I succeeded at last in stretching out my hand towards the weapon on the table: as I did so, on the arm and shoulder I received a strange shock, and my arm fell to my side powerless. And now, to add to my horror, the light began slowly to wane from the candles—they were not, as it were, extinguished, but their flame seemed very gradually withdrawn: it was the same with the fire—the light was extracted from the fuel; in a few minutes the room was in utter darkness. The dread that came over me, to be thus in the dark with that dark Thing, whose power was so intensely felt, brought a reaction of nerve. In fact, terror had reached that climax, that either my senses must have deserted me, or I must have burst through the spell. I did burst through it. I found voice, though the voice was a shriek. I remember that I broke forth with words like these: "I do not fear, my soul does not fear"; and at the same time I found strength to rise. Still in that profound gloom I rushed to one of the windows—tore aside the curtain—flung open the shutters; my first thought was—LIGHT. And when I saw the moon high, clear, and calm, I felt a joy that almost compensated for the previous terror. There was the moon, there was also the light from the gas-lamps in the deserted slumberous street. I turned to look back into the room; the moon penetrated its shadow very palely and partially—but still there was light. The dark Thing, whatever it might be, was gone—except that I could yet see a dim shadow, which seemed the shadow of that shade, against the opposite wall.

My eye now rested on the table, and from under the table (which was without cloth or cover—an old mahogany round table) there rose a Hand, visible as far as the wrist. It was a hand, seemingly, as much of flesh and blood as my own, but the hand of an aged person—lean, wrinkled, small too—a woman's hand. That hand very softly closed on the two letters that lay on the table: hand and letters both vanished. There then came the same three loud measured knocks I had heard at the bed-head before this extraordinary drama had commenced.

As those sounds slowly ceased, I felt the whole room vibrate sensibly; and at the far end there rose, as from the floor, sparks or globules like bubbles of light, many-coloured—green, yellow, fire-red, azure. Up and down, to and fro, hither, thither, as tiny Will-o'-the-Wisps, the sparks moved, slow or swift, each at its own caprice. A chair (as in the drawing-room below) was now advanced from the wall without apparent agency, and placed at the opposite side of the table. Suddenly, as forth from the chair, there grew a shape—a woman's shape. It was distinct as a shape of life—ghastly as a shape of death. The face was that of youth, with a strange mournful beauty; the throat and shoulders were bare, the rest of the form in a loose robe of cloudy white. It began sleeking its long yellow hair, which fell over its shoulders; its eyes were not turned towards me, but to the door; it seemed listening, watching, waiting. The shadow of the shade in the background grew darker; and again I thought I beheld the eyes gleaming out from the summit of the shadow—eyes fixed upon that shape.

As if from the door, though it did not open, there grew out another shape, equally distinct, equally ghastly—a man's shape—a young man's. It was in the dress of the last century, or rather in a likeness of such dress (for both the male shape and the female, though defined, were evidently unsubstantial, impalpable—simulacra—phantasms); and there was something incongruous, grotesque, yet fearful, in the contrast between the elaborate finery, the courtly precision of that old-fashioned garb, with its ruffles and lace and buckles, and the corpse-like aspect and ghost-like stillness of the flitting wearer. Just as the male shape approached the female, the dark Shadow started from the wall, all three for a moment wrapped in darkness. When the pale light returned, the two phantoms were as if in the grasp of the Shadow that towered between them; and there was a blood-stain on the breast of the female; and the phantom male was leaning on its phantom sword, and blood seemed trickling fast from the ruffles, from the lace; and the darkness of the intermediate Shadow swallowed them up—they were gone. And again the bubbles of light shot, and sailed, and undulated, growing thicker and thicker and more wildly confused in their movements.

The closet door to the right of the fireplace now opened, and from the aperture there came the form of an aged woman. In her hand she held letters,—the very letters over which I had seen *the* Hand close; and behind her I heard a footstep. She turned round as if to listen, and then she opened the letters and seemed to read; and over her shoulder I saw a livid face, the face as of a man long drowned—bloated, bleached—seaweed tangled in its dripping hair; and at her feet lay a form as of a corpse, and beside the corpse there cowered a child, a miserable squalid child, with famine in its cheeks and fear in its eyes. And as I looked in the old woman's face, the wrinkles and lines vanished, and it became a face of youth—hard-eyed, stony, but still youth; and the Shadow darted forth, and darkened over these phantoms as it had darkened over the last.

Nothing now was left but the Shadow, and on that my eyes were intently fixed, till again eyes grew out of the Shadow—malignant, serpent eyes. And the bubbles of light again rose and fell, and in their disordered, irregular, turbulent maze, mingled with the wan moonlight. And now from these globules themselves, as from the shell of an egg, monstrous things burst out; the air grew filled with them; larvæ so bloodless and so hideous that I can in no way describe them except to remind the reader of the swarming life which the solar microscope brings before his eyes in a drop of water—things transparent, supple, agile, chasing each other, devouring each other—forms like nought ever beheld by the naked eye. As the shapes were without symmetry, so their movements were without order. In their very vagrancies there was no sport; they came round me and round, thicker and faster and swifter, swarming over my head, crawling over my right arm, which was outstretched in involuntary command against all evil beings. Sometimes I felt myself touched, but not by them; invisible hands touched me. Once I felt the clutch as of cold soft fingers at my throat. I was still equally conscious that if I gave way to fear I should be in bodily peril; and I concentred all my faculties in the single focus of resisting, stubborn will. And I turned my sight from the Shadow—above all, from those strange serpent eyes—eyes that had now become distinctly visible. For there, though in nought else around me, I was aware that there was a WILL, and a will of intense, creative, working evil, which might crush down my own.

The pale atmosphere in the room began now to redden as if in the air of some near conflagration. The larvæ grew lurid as things that live in fire. Again the room vibrated; again were heard the three measured knocks; and again all things were swallowed up in the darkness of the dark Shadow, as if out of that darkness all had come, into that darkness all returned.

As the gloom receded, the Shadow was wholly gone. Slowly, as it had been withdrawn, the flame grew again into the candles on the table, again into the fuel in the grate. The whole room came once more calmly, healthfully into sight.

The two doors were still closed, the door communicating with the servant's room still locked. In the corner of the wall, into which he had so convulsively niched himself, lay the dog. I called to him—no movement; I approached—the animal was dead; his eyes protruded; his tongue out of his mouth; the froth gathered round his jaws. I took him in my arms; I brought him to the fire; I felt acute grief for the loss of my poor favourite—acute self-reproach; I accused myself of his death; I imagined he had died of fright. But what was my surprise on finding that his neck was actually broken. Had this been done in the dark?—must it not have been by a hand human as mine?—must there not have been a human agency all the while in that room? Good cause to suspect it. I cannot tell. I cannot do more than state the fact fairly; the reader may draw his own inference.

Another surprising circumstance—my watch was restored to the table from which it had been so mysteriously withdrawn; but it had stopped at the very moment it was so withdrawn; nor, despite all the skill of the watchmaker, has it ever gone since—that is, it will go in a strange erratic way for a few hours, and then come to a dead stop—it is worthless.

Nothing more chanced for the rest of the night. Nor, indeed, had I long to wait before the dawn broke. Nor till it was broad daylight did I quit the haunted house. Before I did so, I revisited the little blind room in which my servant and myself had been for a time imprisoned. I had a strong impression—for which I could not account—that from that room had originated the mechanism of the phenomena—if I may use the term—which had been experienced in my chamber. And though I entered it now in the clear day, with the sun peering through the filmy window, I still felt, as I stood on its floors, the creep of the horror which I had first there experienced the night before, and which had been so aggravated by what had passed in my own chamber. I could not, indeed, bear to stay more than half a minute within those walls. I descended the stairs, and again I heard the footfall before me; and when I opened the street door, I thought I could distinguish a very low laugh. I gained my own home, expecting to find my runaway servant there. But he had not presented himself, nor did I hear more of him for three days, when I received a letter from him, dated from Liverpool to this effect:

> Honoured Sir:
>
> I humbly entreat your pardon, though I can scarcely hope that you will think that I deserve it, unless—which Heaven forbid!—you saw what I did. I feel that it will be years before I can recover myself; and as to being fit for service, it is out of the question. I am therefore going to my brother-in-law at Melbourne. The ship sails to-morrow. Perhaps the long voyage may set me up. I do nothing now but start and tremble, and fancy IT is behind me. I humbly beg you, honoured sir, to order my clothes, and whatever wages are due to me, to be sent to my mother's, at Walworth—John knows her address.

The letter ended with additional apologies, somewhat incoherent, and explanatory details as to effects that had been under the writer's charge.

This flight may perhaps warrant a suspicion that the man wished to go to Australia, and had been somehow or other fraudulently mixed up with the events of the night. I say nothing in refutation of that conjecture; rather, I suggest it as one that would seem to many persons the most probable solution of improbable occurrences. My belief in my own theory remained unshaken. I returned in the evening to the house, to bring away in a hack cab the things I had left there, with my poor dog's body. In this task I was not disturbed, nor did any incident worth note befall me, except that still, on ascending and descending the stairs, I heard the same footfall in advance. On leaving the house, I went to Mr. J——'s. He was at home. I returned him the keys, told him that my curiosity was sufficiently gratified, and was about to relate quickly what had passed, when he stopped me, and said, though with much politeness, that he had no longer any interest in a mystery which none had ever solved.

I determined at least to tell him of the two letters I had read, as well as of the extraordinary manner in which they had disappeared, and I then inquired if he thought they had been addressed to the woman who had died in the house, and if there were anything in her early history which could possibly confirm the dark suspicions to which the letters gave rise. Mr. J—— seemed startled, and, after musing a few moments, answered: "I am but little acquainted with the woman's earlier history, except, as I before told you, that her family were known to mine. But you revive some vague reminiscences to her prejudice. I will make inquiries, and inform you of their result. Still, even if we could admit the popular superstition that a person who had been either the perpetrator or the victim of dark crimes in life could revisit, as a restless spirit, the scene in which those crimes had been committed, I should observe that the house was infested by strange sights and sounds before the old woman died—you smile—what would you say?"

"I would say this, that I am convinced, if we could get to the bottom of these mysteries, we should find a living human agency."

"What! you believe it is all an imposture? for what object?"

"Not an imposture in the ordinary sense of the word. If suddenly I were to sink into a deep sleep, from which you could not awake me, but in that sleep could answer questions with an accuracy which I could not pretend to when awake—tell you what money you had in your pocket—nay, describe your very thoughts—it is not necessarily an imposture, any more than it is necessarily supernatural. I should be, unconsciously to myself, under a mesmeric influence, conveyed to me from a distance by a human being who had acquired power over me by previous *rapport*."

"But if a mesmeriser could so affect another living being, can you suppose that a mesmeriser could also affect inanimate objects: move chairs—open and shut doors?"

"Or impress our senses with the belief in such effects—we never having been *en rapport* with the person acting on us? No. What is commonly called mesmerism could not do this; but there may be a power akin to mesmerism and superior to it—the power that in the old days was called Magic. That such a power may extend to all inanimate objects of matter, I do not say; but if so, it would not be against nature—it would only be a rare power in nature which might be given to constitutions with certain peculiarities, and cultivated by practice to an extraordinary degree. That such a power might extend over the dead—that is, over certain thoughts and memories that the dead may still retain—and compel, not that which ought properly to be called the SOUL, and which is far beyond human reach, but rather a phantom of what has been most earth-stained on earth to make itself apparent to our senses—is a very ancient though obsolete theory, upon which I will hazard no opinion. But I do not conceive the power would be supernatural. Let me illustrate what I mean from an experiment which Paracelsus describes as not difficult, and which the author of the *Curiosities of Literature* cites as credible: A flower perishes; you burn it. Whatever were the elements of that flower while it lived are gone, dispersed, you know not whither; you can never discover nor re-collect them. But you can, by chemistry, out of the burnt dust of that flower, raise a spectrum of the flower, just as it seemed in life. It may be the same with the human being. The soul has as much escaped you as the essence or elements of the flower. Still you may make a spectrum of it. And this phantom, though in the popular superstition it is held to be the soul of the departed, must not be confounded with the true soul; it is but the eidolon of the dead form. Hence, like the best attested stories of ghosts or spirits, the thing that most strikes us is the absence of what we hold to be the soul; that is, of superior emancipated intelligence. These apparitions come for little or no object—they seldom speak when they do come; if they speak, they utter no ideas above those of an ordinary person on earth. American spirit-seers have published volumes of communications, in prose and verse, which they assert to be given in the names of the most illustrious dead—Shakespeare, Bacon—Heaven knows whom. Those communications, taking the best, are certainly not a whit of higher order than would be communications from living persons of fair talent and education; they are wondrously inferior to what Bacon, Shakespeare, and Plato said and wrote when on earth. Nor, what is more noticeable, do they ever contain an idea that was not on the earth before. Wonderful, therefore, as such phenomena may be (granting them to be truthful), I see much that philosophy may question, nothing that it is incumbent on philosophy to deny—viz., nothing supernatural. They are but ideas conveyed somehow or other (we have not yet discovered the means) from one mortal brain to another. Whether, in so doing, tables walk of their own accord, or fiend-like shapes appear in a magic circle, or bodyless hands rise and remove material objects, or a Thing of Darkness, such as presented itself to me, freeze our blood—still am I persuaded that these are but agencies conveyed, as by electric wires, to my own brain from the brain of another. In some constitutions there is a natural chemistry, and those constitutions may produce chemic wonders—in others a natural fluid, call it electricity, and these may produce electric wonders. But the wonders differ from Normal Science in this—they are alike objectless, purposeless, puerile, frivolous. They lead on to no grand results; and therefore the world does not heed, and true sages have not cultivated them. But sure I am, that of all I saw or heard, a man, human as myself, was the remote originator; and I believe unconsciously to himself as to the exact effects produced, for this reason: no two persons, you say, have ever told you that they experienced exactly the same thing. Well, observe, no two persons ever experience exactly the same dream. If this were an ordinary imposture, the machinery would be arranged for results that would but little vary; if it were a supernatural agency permitted by the Almighty, it would surely be for some definite end. These phenomena belong to neither class; my persuasion is that they originate in some brain now far distant; that that brain had no distinct volition in anything that occurred; that what does occur reflects but its devious, motley, ever-shifting, half-formed thoughts; in short, that it has been but the dreams of such a brain put into action and invested with a semi-substance. That this brain is of immense power, that it can set matter into movement, that it is malignant and destructive, I believe; some material force must have killed my dog; the same force might, for aught I know, have sufficed to kill myself, had I been as subjugated by terror as the dog—had my intellect or my spirit given me no countervailing resistance in my will."

"It killed your dog! that is fearful! indeed it is strange that no animal can be induced to stay in that house; not even a cat. Rats and mice are never found in it."

"The instincts of the brute creation detect influences deadly to their existence. Man's reason has a sense less subtle, because it has a resisting power more supreme. But enough; do you comprehend my theory?"

"Yes, though imperfectly—and I accept any crotchet (pardon the word), however odd, rather than embrace at once the notion of ghosts and hobgoblins we imbibed in our nurseries. Still, to my unfortunate house the evil is the same. What on earth can I do with the house?"

"I will tell you what I would do. I am convinced from my own internal feelings that the small unfurnished room at right angles to the door of the bedroom which I occupied forms a starting-point or receptacle for the influences which haunt the house; and I strongly advise you to have the walls opened, the floor removed—nay, the whole room pulled down. I observe that it is detached from the body of the house, built over the small back-yard, and could be removed without injury to the rest of the building."

"And you think, if I did that——"

"You would cut off the telegraph wires. Try it. I am so persuaded that I am right, that I will pay half the expense if you will allow me to direct the operations."

"Nay, I am well able to afford the cost; for the rest, allow me to write to you."

About ten days after I received a letter from Mr. J——, telling me that he had visited the house since I had seen him; that he had found the two letters I had described, replaced in the drawer from which I had taken them; that he had read them with misgivings like my own; that he had instituted a cautious inquiry about the woman to whom I rightly conjectured they had been written. It seemed that thirty-six years ago (a year before the date of the letters) she had married, against the wish of her relations, an American of very suspicious character; in fact, he was generally believed to have been a pirate. She herself was the daughter of very respectable tradespeople, and had served in the capacity of a nursery governess before her marriage. She had a brother, a widower, who was considered wealthy, and who had one child of about six years old. A month after the marriage, the body of this brother was found in the Thames, near London Bridge; there seemed some marks of violence about his throat, but they were not deemed sufficient to warrant the inquest in any other verdict than that of "found drowned."

The American and his wife took charge of the little boy, the deceased brother having by his will left his sister the guardian of his only child—and in event of the child's death, the sister inherited. The child died about six months afterwards—it was supposed to have been neglected and ill-treated. The neighbours deposed to have heard it shriek at night. The surgeon who had examined it after death said that it was emaciated as if from want of nourishment, and the body was covered with livid bruises. It seemed that one winter night the child had sought to escape—crept out into the back-yard—tried to scale the wall—fallen back exhausted, and been found at morning on the stones in a dying state. But though there was some evidence of cruelty, there was none of murder; and the aunt and her husband had sought to palliate cruelty by alleging the exceeding stubbornness and perversity of the child, who was declared to be half-witted. Be that as it may, at the orphan's death the aunt inherited her brother's fortune. Before the first wedded year was out, the American quitted England abruptly, and never returned to it. He obtained a cruising vessel, which was lost in the Atlantic two years afterwards. The widow was left in affluence: but reverses of various kinds had befallen her: a bank broke—an investment failed—she went into a small business and became insolvent—then she entered into service, sinking lower and lower, from housekeeper down to maid-of-all-work—never long retaining a place, though nothing decided against her character was ever alleged. She was considered sober, honest, and peculiarly quiet in her ways; still nothing prospered with her. And so she had dropped into the workhouse, from which Mr. J—— had taken her, to be placed in charge of the very house which she had rented as mistress in the first year of her wedded life.

Mr. J—— added that he had passed an hour alone in the unfurnished room which I had urged him to destroy, and that his impressions of dread while there were so great, though he had neither heard nor seen anything, that he was eager to have the walls bared and the floors removed as I had suggested. He had engaged persons for the work, and would commence any day I would name.

The day was accordingly fixed. I repaired to the haunted house—we went into the blind dreary room, took up the skirting, and then the floors. Under the rafters, covered with rubbish, was found a trap-door, quite large enough to admit a man. It was closely nailed down, with clamps and rivets of iron. On removing these we descended into a room below, the existence of which had never been suspected. In this room there had been a window and a flue, but they had been bricked over, evidently for many years. By the help of candles we examined this place; it still retained some mouldering furniture—three chairs, an oak settle, a table—all of the fashion of about eighty years ago. There was a chest of drawers against the wall, in which we found, half-rotted away, old-fashioned articles of a man's dress, such as might have been worn eighty or a hundred years ago by a gentleman of some rank—costly steel buckles and buttons, like those yet worn in court-dresses, a handsome court sword. In a waistcoat which had once been rich with gold-lace, but which was now blackened and foul with damp, we found five guineas, a few silver coins, and an ivory ticket, probably for some place of entertainment long since passed away. But our main discovery was in a kind of iron safe fixed to the wall, the lock of which it cost us much trouble to get picked.

In this safe were three shelves, and two small drawers. Ranged on the shelves were several small bottles of crystal, hermetically stopped. They contained colourless volatile essences, of the nature of which I shall only say that they were not poisons—phosphor and ammonia entered into some of them. There were also some very curious glass tubes, and a small pointed rod of iron, with a large lump of rock-crystal, and another of amber—also a loadstone of great power.

In one of the drawers we found a miniature portrait set in gold, and retaining the freshness of its colours most remarkably, considering the length of time it had probably been there. The portrait was that of a man who might be somewhat advanced in middle life, perhaps forty-seven or forty-eight.

It was a remarkable face—a most impressive face. If you could fancy some mighty serpent transformed into man, preserving in the human lineaments the old serpent type, you would have a better idea of that countenance than long descriptions can convey: the width and flatness of frontal—the tapering elegance of contour disguising the strength of the deadly jaw—the long, large, terrible eye, glittering and green as the emerald—and withal a certain ruthless calm, as if from the consciousness of an immense power.

Mechanically I turned round the miniature to examine the back of it, and on the back was engraved a pentacle; in the middle of the pentacle a ladder, and the third step of the ladder was formed by the date 1765. Examining still more minutely, I detected a spring; this, on being pressed, opened the back of the miniature as a lid. Within-side the lid were engraved, "Marianna to thee—Be faithful in life and in death to ——." Here follows a name that I will not mention, but it was not unfamiliar to me. I had heard it spoken of by old men in my childhood as the name borne by a dazzling charlatan who had made a great sensation in London for a year or so, and had fled the country on the charge of a double murder within his own house—that of his mistress and his rival. I said nothing of this to Mr. J——, to whom reluctantly I resigned the miniature.

We had found no difficulty in opening the first drawer within the iron safe; we found great difficulty in opening the second: it was not locked, but it resisted all efforts, till we inserted in the chinks the edge of a chisel. When we had thus drawn it forth, we found a very singular apparatus in the nicest order. Upon a small thin book, or rather tablet, was placed a saucer of crystal; this saucer was filled with a clear liquid—on that liquid floated a kind of compass, with a needle shifting rapidly round; but instead of the usual points of a compass were seven strange characters, not very unlike those used by astrologers to denote the planets. A peculiar, but not strong nor displeasing odour, came from this drawer, which was lined with a wood that we afterwards discovered to be hazel. Whatever the cause of this odour, it produced a material effect on the nerves. We all felt it, even the two workmen who were in the room—a creeping tingling sensation from the tips of the fingers to the roots of the hair. Impatient to examine the tablet, I removed the saucer. As I did so the needle of the compass went round and round with exceeding swiftness, and I felt a shock that ran through my whole frame, so that I dropped the saucer on the floor. The liquid was spilt—the saucer was broken—the compass rolled to the end of the room—and at that instant the walls shook to and fro, as if a giant had swayed and rocked them.

The two workmen were so frightened that they ran up the ladder by which we had descended from the trap-door; but seeing that nothing more happened, they were easily induced to return.

Meanwhile I had opened the tablet: it was bound in plain red leather, with a silver clasp; it contained but one sheet of thick vellum, and on that sheet were inscribed, within a double pentacle, words in old monkish Latin, which are literally to be translated thus: "On all that it can reach within these walls—sentient or inanimate, living or dead—as moves the needle, so work my will! Accursed be the house, and restless be the dwellers therein."

We found no more. Mr. J—— burnt the tablet and its anathema. He razed to the foundations the part of the building containing the secret room with the chamber over it. He had then the courage to inhabit the house himself for a month, and a quieter, better-conditioned house could not be found in all London. Subsequently he let it to advantage, and his tenant has made no complaints.

ROBERT SURTEES

(1803–1864)

ROBERT SMITH SURTEES had an upbringing which tended to develop his natural love of sport and outdoor life generally. His first literary venture of any note was the foundation of *The New Sporting Magazine* in 1831, in which he published the immortal adventures of "Mr. Jorrocks," the sporting grocer. Among his other well-known works are *Handley Cross* (1843), *Ask Mamma* (1858), and *Mr. Facey Romford's Hounds* (1865). He also wrote for *The Horseman's Manual.*

"The Cheltenham Dandy" is reprinted from *Jorrocks' Jaunts and Jollities.*

THE CHELTENHAM DANDY

MR. JORROCKS had been very poorly indeed of indigestion, as he calls it, produced by tucking in too much roast-beef and plum-pudding at Christmas, and prolonging the period of his festivities a little beyond the season allowed by Moore's Almanack; and having in vain applied the usual remedies prescribed on such occasions, he at length consented to try the Cheltenham waters, though altogether opposed to the element, he not having "astonished his stomach," as he says, for the last fifteen years with a glass of water.

Having established himself and the Yorkshireman in a small private lodging in High-street, consisting of two bedrooms and a sitting-room, he commenced his first visits to the Royal Spa, and after a few good drenches, picked up so rapidly, that to whatever inn they went to dine, the landlords and waiters were astounded at the consumption of prog, and in a very short time he was known from the Royal Hotel down to Hurlston's Commercial Inn, as the great London cormorant. At first, however, he was extremely depressed in spirits, and did nothing the whole day after his arrival, but talk about the arrangement of his temporal affairs; and the first symptom he gave of returning health was one day at dinner at the Plough, by astonishing two or three scarlet-coated swells, who as usual were disporting themselves in the coffee-room, by bellowing out to the waiter for some Talli-ho sarce to his fish. Before this he had never once spoken of his favourite diversion, and the sportsmen cantered by the window to cover in the morning, and back in the afternoon, without eliciting a single observation from him. The morning after this change for the better, he addressed his companion at breakfast as follows, "Blow me tight, Mr. York, if I aren't regularly renowated. I'm as fresh as an old hat after a shower of rain. I really thinks I shall get over this terrible illness, for I dreamt of 'unting last night, and if you've a mind, we'll go and see my Lord Segrave's reynard dog, and then start from this 'ere corrupt place, for, you see, it's nothing but a town, and what's the use of sticking oneself in a little pokey lodging like this 'ere, where there really is not room to swing a cat, and paying the deuce knows how much tin, too, when one has a splendid house in Great Coram-street going on all the time, with a *rigler* establishment of servants and all that sort of thing. Now, you knows, I doesn't grudge a wisit to Margate, though that's a town too, but then, you see, one has the sea to look at, whereas here, it's nothing but a long street with shops, not so good as those in Red Lion-street, with a few small streets branching off from it, and as to the prom-me-nard, as they calls it, aside the Spa, with its trees and garden stuff, why, I'm sure, to my mind, the Clarence Gardens up by the Regent's Park are quite as fine. It's true the doctor says I must remain another fortnight to perfect the cure, but then them 'ere M.D.'s, or whatever you calls them, are such rum jockeys, and I always thinks they say one word for the patient and two for themselves. Now, my chap said, I must only take half a bottle o' black strap a day at the *werry most*, whereas I have never had less than a whole one—his half first, as I say, and my own after—and because I tells him I take a pint, he flatters himself his treatment is capital, and that he is a wonderful M.D.; but as a man can't be better than well, I think we'll just see what there's to be seen in the neighbourhood, and then cut our sticks, and, as I said before, I should like werry much to see my Lord Segrave's hounds, in order that I may judge whether there is anything in the wide world to be compared to the Surrey, for if I remember aught, Mr. Nimrod described them as werry, werry fine, indeed."

Having formed this resolution, Jorrocks stamped on the floor (for the bell was broken) for the little boy who did the odd jobs of the house, to bring up his Hessian boots, into which having thrust his great calves and replaced the old brown great-coat which he uses for a dressing-gown by a superfine Saxony blue, with metal buttons, and pockets outside, he pulled his wig straight, stuck his white hat with the green flaps knowingly on his head, and sallied forth for execution as stout a man as ever. Knowing that the kennel is near the Winchcourt road, they proceeded in that direction, but after walking about a mile, came on a groom upon a chestnut horse, who, returning from the chase, was wetting his whistle at the appropriate sign of the Fox and Hounds, and who informed them that they had passed the turning for the kennel, but that the hounds were out, and then in a wood which he pointed out on the hill-side about two miles off, into which they had just brought their fox. Looking in that direction, they presently saw the summit of one of the highest of the range of hills that encircles the town of Cheltenham, covered with horsemen and pedestrians, who kept moving backwards and forwards on the "mountain's brow," looking in the distance more like a flock of sheep than anything else. Jorrocks, being all right again and up to anything, proposed a start to the wood, and though he thought they should hardly reach it before the hounds either killed their fox or he broke away again, they agreed to take the chance, and away they went, "best leg first" as the saying is. The cover (Queen Wood by name, and, as Jorrocks found out from somebody, the property of Lord Ellenborough) being much larger than it at first appeared, and the fox but a bad one, they were in lots of time, and having toiled to the top of the wood, Jorrocks swaggered in among the horsemen with all the importance of an alderman. For full an hour after they got there the hounds kept running in cover, the fox being repeatedly viewed and the pack continually pressing him. Once or twice he came out, but after skirting the cover's edge a few yards, turned in again. Indeed, there were two foxes on foot, one being a three-legged one, and it was extraordinary how he went and stood before hounds, going apparently very cautiously and stopping every now and then to listen. At last a thundering old grey-backed fellow went away before the whole field, making for the steep declivities that lead into the downs, and though the brow of the hill was covered with foot people who holloa'd and shouted enough to turn a lion, he *would* make his point, and only altering his course so as to avoid running right among the mob, he gained the summit of the hill and disappeared. This hill, being uncommonly steep, was a breather for hounds that had been running so long as they had, in a thick cover too, and neither they nor the horses went at it with any great dash. The fox was not a fellow to be caught very easily, and nothing but a good start could have given them any chance, but the hounds never got well settled to the scent, and after a fruitless cast his Lordship gave it up, and Jorrocks and Co. trudged back to Cheltenham, J. highly delighted at so favourable an opportunity of seeing the hounds. Indeed, so pleased was he with the turn-out and the whole thing, that finding from Skinner, one of the whippers-in, that they met on the following morning at Purge-Down-turnpike, in their best country, forgetting all about his indigestion and the Royal Spa, he went to Newman and Longridge, the horse dealers and livery-stable keepers, and engaged a couple of nags to "look at the hounds upon," as he impressed upon their minds, which he ordered to be ready at nine o'clock.

This day he proposed to give the landlord of the George Inn, in the High-street, the benefit of his rapacious appetite, and about five o'clock (his latest London hour) they sat down to dinner. The George is neither exactly a swell house like the Royal Hotel or the Plough, nor yet a commercial one, but something betwixt and between. The coffee-room is very small, consequently all the frequenters are drawn together, and if a conversation is started a man must be deuced unsociable that does not join in the cry.

As three or four were sitting round the fire chatting over their tipple, and Jorrocks was telling some of his best bouncers, the door opened and a waiter bowed a fresh animal into the cage, who, after eyeing the party, took off his coat and forthwith proceeded to pull off divers neckcloths, cloaks, great-coats, muffitees, until he reduced himself to about half the size he was on entering. He was a little square-built old man, with white hair and plenty of it, a long stupid red face with little pig eyes, a very long awkward body, and very short legs. He was dressed in a blue coat, buff waistcoat, a sort of baggy grey or thunder-and-lightning trousers, over which he had buttoned a pair of long black gaiters. Having "peeled," he rubbed his hands and blew upon them, as much as to say, "Now, gentlemen, won't you let me have a smell of the fire?" and, accordingly, by a sort of military revolution, they made a place for him right in the centre.

"Coldish night, I reckon, sir," said Jorrocks, looking him over.

"Very cold indeed, very cold indeed," answered he, rubbing his elbows against his ribs, and stamping with his feet. "I've just got off the top of the Liverpool coach, and, I can assure *you*, it's very cold riding outside a coach all day long—however, I always say that it's better than being inside, though, indeed, it's *very* little that I trouble coaches at all in the course of the year—generally travel in my *own* carriage, only my family have it with them in Bristol now, where I'm going to join them; but I'm well used to the elements, hunting, shooting, and fishing, as I do constantly."

This latter announcement made Jorrocks rouse up, and finding himself in the company of a sportsman, and one too who travelled in his *own* carriage, he assumed a different tone and commenced on a fresh tack: "And, pray, may I make bold to inquire what country you hunts in, sir?" said he.

"Oh! I live in Cheshire—Mainwaring's country, but Melton's the place I chiefly hunt at—know all the fellows there; rare set of dogs, to be sure—only country worth hunting in, to my mind."

JORROCKS. *Rigler* sells, though, the chaps, aren't they? Recollect one swell of a fellow coming with his upper lip all over fur into our country, thinking to astonish our weak minds, but I reckon we told him out.

STRANGER. What! *you* hunt, do you?

JORROCKS. A few—you've perhaps heard tell of the Surrey 'unt?

STRANGER. Cocktail affair, isn't it?

JORROCKS. *No such thing*, *I assure you*. Cocktail indeed! I likes that.

STRANGER. Well, but it's not what we calls a fast-coach.

JORROCKS. I doesn't know *wot you calls* a fast-coach, but if you've a mind to make a match, I'll bet you a hat, ay, or half a dozen hats, that I'll find a fellow to take the conceit out o' any o' your Meltonians.

STRANGER. Oh! I don't doubt but you have some good men among you; I'm sure I didn't mean anything offensive, by asking if it was a cocktail affair, but *we* Meltonians certainly have a trick, I must confess, of running every other country down; come, sir, I'll drink the Surrey hunt with all my heart, said he, swigging off the remains of a glass of brandy-and-water which the waiter had brought him shortly after entering.

JORROCKS. Thank you, sir, kindly. Waiter, bring me a bottom o' brandy, cold, without—and don't stint for quantity, if you please. Doesn't you think these inns werry expensive places, sir? I doesn't mean this in particular, but inns in general.

STRANGER. Oh! I don't know, sir. We must expect to pay. "Live and let live," is my motto. I always pay my inn bills without looking them over. Just cast my eyes at the bottom to see the amount, then call for pen and ink, add so much for waiter, so much for chambermaid, so much for boots, and if I'm travelling in my *own* carriage so much for the ostler for greasing. That's the way *I* do business, sir.

JORROCKS. Well, sir, a werry pleasant plan too, especially for the inn-keeper—and all werry right for a gentleman of fortune like you. My motto, however, is "Waste not, want not," and my wife's father's motto was "Wilful waste brings woeful want," and I likes to have my money's worth.—Now, said he, pulling out a handful of bills, at some places that I go to they charges me six shillings a day for my dinner, and when I was ill and couldn't digest nothing but the lightest and plainest of breakfasts when a fork breakfast in fact would have made a stiff 'un of me, and my muffin mill was almost stopped, they charged me two shillings for one cake, and sixpence for two eggs.—Now, I'm in the tea trade myself, you must know, and I contend that as things go, or at least as things went before the Barbarian eye, as they call Napier, kicked up a row with the Hong merchants, it's altogether a shameful imposition, and I wonder people put up with it.

Stranger. Oh, sir, I don't know. I think that is the charge all over the country. Besides it doesn't do to look too closely at these things, and you must allow something for keeping up the coffee-room, you know—fire, candles, and so on.

Jorrocks. But blow me tight, you surely don't want a candle to breakfast by? However, I contends that inn-keepers are great fools for making these sort of charges, for it makes people get out of their houses as quick as ever they can, whereas they might be inclined to stay if they could get things moderate.—For my part I likes a coffee-room, but having been used to commercial houses when I travelled, I knows what the charges ought to be. Now, this room is snug enough, though small, and won't require no great keeping up.

Stranger. No—but this room is smaller than the generality of them, you know. They frequently have two fires in them, besides no end of oil-burning—I know the expense of these things, for I have a very *large* house in the country, and rely upon it, inn-keepers have not such immense profits as many people imagines—but, as I said before, "live and let live."

Jorrocks. So says I, "live and let live"—but wot I complains of is, that some inn-keepers charge so much that they won't *let* people live. No man is fonder of eating than myself, but I don't like to pay by the mouthful, or yet to drink tea at so much a thimbleful. By the way, *Sar,* if you are not previously engaged, I should be werry happy to supply you with red Mocho or best Twankay at a very reasonable figure indeed for cash?

Stranger. Thank you, sir, thank you. Those are things I never interfere with—leave all those things to my people. My housekeeper sends me in her book every quarter day, with an account of what she pays. I just look at the amount—add so much for wages, and write a cheque—"live and let live!" say I. However, added he, pulling out his watch, and ringing the bell for the chambermaid, I have to get up very early, so I think it is time to go to bed, and I wish you a very good night, gentlemen *all.*

Jorrocks gets up, advances half-way to the door, makes him one of his most obsequious bows, and wishes him a werry good night. Having heard him tramp upstairs and safely deposited in his bed-room, they pulled their chairs together again, and making a smaller circle round the fire, proceeded to canvass their departed friend. Jorrocks began: "I say, wot a regular swell the chap is—a Meltonian, too—I *wonders* who the deuce he is. Wish Mr. Nimrod was among us, he could tell us all about him, I daresay. I'm blowed if I didn't take him for a commercial gentleman at first, until he spoke about his carriages. I likes to see gentlemen of fortune making themselves sociable by coming into the coffee-room, instead of sticking themselves up in private sitting-rooms, as if nobody was good enough for them. You know Melton, Mr. York; did you ever see the gentleman out?"

"I can't say that I ever did," said his friend, "but people look so different in their red coats to what they do in mufti, that there's no such thing as recognising them unless you had a previous acquaintance with them. The fields in Leicestershire are sometimes so large that it requires a residence to get anything like a general knowledge of the hunt, and, you know, Northamptonshire's the country for my money, *after* Surrey, of course."

"I don't think *he is* a gentleman," observed a thin, sallow-complexioned young man, who, sitting on one side of the fire, had watched the stranger very narrowly without joining in the conversation. "He gives me more the idea of a gentleman's servant, acting the part of master, than anything else."

JORROCKS. Oh! he is a *gentleman*, I'm sure—besides, a servant wouldn't travel in a carriage you know, and he talked about greasing the wheels and all that sort of thing, which showed he was familiar with the thing.

"That's very true," replied the youth, "but a servant may travel in the rumble and pay for greasing the wheels all the same, or perhaps have to grease himself."

"Well, I should say that he's a foolish, purse-proud sort of fellow," observed another, "who has come into money unexpectedly, and who likes to be the cock of his party and show off a little."

JORROCKS. I'll be bound to say you're *all* wrong—you are not fox-hunters, you see, or you would know that that is a way the sportsmen have—we always make ourselves at home and agreeable—have a word for everybody in fact, and no reserve; besides, you see, there was nothing gammonacious, as I calls it, about his toggery, no round-cut coats with sporting buttons, or coaches and four, or foxes for pins in his shirt.

"I don't care for that," replied the sallow youth; "dress him as you will, court suit, bag wig, and sword, you'll make nothing better of him—he's a SNOB."

Jorrocks, getting up, runs to the table on which the hats were standing, saying: "I wonder if he's left his castor behind him? I've always found a man's hat will tell a good deal. This is yours, Mr. York, with the loop to it, and here's mine—I always writes Golgotha in mine, which being interpreted, you know, means the place of a skull. These are yours, I presume, gentlemen?" said he, taking up two others. "Confound him, he's taken his tile with him—however, I'm quite positive he's a gentleman—lay you a hat apiece all round he is, if you like?"

"But how are we to prove it?" inquired the youth.

JORROCKS. Call in the waiter.

Youth. He may know nothing about him, and a waiter's gentleman is always the man who pays him most.

Jorrocks. Trust the waiter for knowing something about him, and if he doesn't, why, it's only to send a *pur*lite message upstairs, saying that two gentlemen in the coffee-room have bet a trifle that he is some nobleman—Lord Maryborough, for instance—he's a little chap—but we must make haste, or the gentleman will be asleep.

"Well, then, I'll take your bet of a hat," replied the youth, "that he is not what *I* call a gentleman."

Jorrocks. I don't know what *you* calls a gentleman. I'll lay you a hat, a guinea one, either white or black, whichever you like, but none o' your dog hairs or gossamers, mind—that he's a man of dibs, and doesn't follow no trade or calling, and if that isn't a gentleman, I don't know wot is. What say you, Mr. York?"

"Suppose we put it thus: You bet this gentleman a hat that he's a Meltonian, which will comprise all the rest."

Jorrocks. Werry well put. Do you take me, sir? A guinea hat against a guinea hat.

"I do," said the youth.

Jorrocks. Then DONE—now ring the bell for the waiter—I'll pump him.

Enter waiter.

Jorrocks. *Snaff* them candles, if you please, and bring me another bottom o' brandy-cold, without—and, waiter! here, pray who is that *gentleman* that came in by the Liverpool coach to-night? The little *gentleman* in long black gaiters who sat in this chair, you know, and had some brandy-and-water?

Waiter. I know who you mean, sir, quite well; the gentleman who's just gone to bed. Let me see, what's his name? He keeps that large hotel in —— Street, Liverpool—what's the—— Here an immense burst of laughter drowned the remainder of the sentence.

Jorrocks rose in a rage. "No! you double-distilled blockhead," said he, "no such thing—you're thinking of someone else. The gentleman hunts at Melton Mowbray, and travels in his own carriage."

Waiter. I don't know nothing about Melton Mowbray, sir, but the last time he came through here on his road to Bristol, he was in one of his *own* rattle-trap yellows, and had such a load—his wife, a nurse, and eight children inside; himself, his son, and an apple-tree on the dickey—that the horses knocked up half-way and——

Jorrocks. *Say* no more—*say* no more—d——n his teeth and toenails—and *that's* swearing—a thing I never do but on the most outrageous occasions. Confounded humbug, I'll be upsides with him, however. Waiter, bring the bill and *no* more brandy. Never was so done in all my life—a gammonacious fellow!

"There, sir, there's your one pound one," said he, handing a sovereign and a shilling to the winner of the hat, "give me my tile and let's mizzle.—Waiter, I can't wait; must bring the bill up to my lodgings in the morning if it isn't ready.—Come away, come away, I shall never get over this as long as ever I live. 'Live and let live,' indeed! no wonder he stuck up for the inn-keepers—a publican and a sinner as he is. Good night, gentlemen, good night."

Exit Jorrocks.

BENJAMIN DISRAELI

(1804–1881)

BENJAMIN DISRAELI, who was "born in a library" in London, was the son of the well-known man of letters, Isaac D'Israeli. Of Jewish descent, he was baptised into the Christian Church in 1817. At the age of seventeen, he was articled to a firm of solicitors, but that profession had no charm for him, and he soon abandoned it. In 1826 he published the first part of *Vivian Grey*, which made him notorious; and then he travelled for three years. On his return he published a long series of novels and some burlesques, including *Popanilla* (1828). He takes his place in English letters by virtue of the political trilogy, *Coningsby* (1844), *Sybil* (1845), and *Tancred* (1847). It was not until 1870, when he had been Prime Minister, that he published *Lothair*, one of the greatest of his novels.

POPANILLA

CHAPTER I

THERE is an island in the Indian Ocean, so unfortunate as not yet to have been visited either by Discovery Ships or Missionary Societies. It is a place where all those things are constantly found which men most desire to see, and with the sight of which they are seldom favoured. It abounds in flowers, and fruit, and sunshine. Lofty mountains, covered with green and mighty forests, except where the red rocks catch the fierce beams of the blazing sun, bowery valleys, broad lakes, gigantic trees, and gushing rivers bursting from rocky gorges, are crowned with a purple and ever cloudless sky. Summer, in its most unctuous state and most mellow majesty, is here perpetual. So intense and overpowering, in the daytime, is the rich union of heat and perfume, that living animal or creature is never visible; and were you and I to pluck, before sunset, the huge fruit from yonder teeming tree, we might fancy ourselves for the moment the future sinners of another Eden. Yet a solitude it is not.

The island is surrounded by a calm and blue lagoon, formed by a ridge of coral rocks, which break the swell of the ocean, and prevent the noxious spray from banishing the rich shrubs which grow even to the water's edge. It is a few minutes before sunset that the first intimation of animal existence in this seeming solitude is given, by the appearance of mermaids; who, floating on the rosy sea, congregate about these rocks. They sound a loud but melodious chorus from their sea-shells, and a faint and distant chorus soon answers from the island. The mermaidens immediately repeat their salutations, and are greeted with a nearer and louder answer. As the red and rayless sun drops into the glowing waters, the choruses simultaneously join; and rushing from the woods, and down the mountain steeps to the nearest shore, crowds of human beings, at the same moment, appear and collect.

The inhabitants of this island, in form and face, do not misbecome the clime and the country. With the vivacity of a Faun, the men combine the strength of a Hercules and the beauty of an Adonis; and, as their more interesting companions flash upon his presence, the least classical of poets might be excused for imagining that, like their blessed Goddess, the women had magically sprung from the brilliant foam of that ocean which is gradually subsiding before them.

But sunset in this land is not the signal merely for the evidence of human existence. At the moment that the Islanders, crowned with flowers, and waving goblets and garlands, burst from their retreats, upon each mountain peak a lion starts forward, stretches his proud tail, and, bellowing to the sun, scours back exulting to his forest; immense bodies, which before would have been mistaken for the trunks of trees, now move into life, and serpents, untwining their green and glittering folds, and slowly bending their crested heads around, seem proudly conscious of a voluptuous existence; troops of monkeys leap from tree to tree; panthers start forward, and alarmed, not alarming, instantly vanish; a herd of milk-white elephants tramples over the background of the scene; and instead of gloomy owls and noxious beetles, to hail the long-enduring twilight, from the bell of every opening flower beautiful birds, radiant with every rainbow tint, rush with a long and living melody into the cool air.

The twilight in this island is not that transient moment of unearthly bliss, which, in our less favoured regions, always leaves us so thoughtful and so sad; on the contrary, it lasts many hours, and consequently the Islanders are neither moody nor sorrowful. As they sleep during the day, four or five hours of "tipsy dance and revelry" are exercise and not fatigue. At length, even in this delightful region, the rosy tint fades into purple, and the purple into blue; the white moon gleams, and at length glitters; and the invisible stars first creep into light, and then blaze into radiancy. But no hateful dews discolour their loveliness! and so clear is the air, that instead of the false appearance of a studded vault, the celestial bodies may be seen floating in æther, at various distances and of various tints. Ere the showery fire-flies have ceased to shine, and the blue lights to play about the tremulous horizon, amid the voices of a thousand birds, the dancers solace themselves with the rarest fruits, the most delicate fish, and the most delicious wines; but flesh they love not. They are an innocent and a happy, though a voluptuous and ignorant race. They have no manufactures, no commerce, no agriculture, and no printing-presses; but for their slight clothing they wear the bright skins of serpents; for corn, nature gives them the bread-fruit; and for intellectual amusement, they have a pregnant fancy and a ready wit; tell inexhaustible stories, and always laugh at each other's jokes. A natural instinct gave them the art of making wine; and it was the same benevolent nature that blessed them also with the knowledge of the art of making love. But time flies even here. The lovely companions have danced, and sung, and banqueted, and laughed; what further bliss remains for man? They rise, and in pairs wander about the island, and then to their bowers; their life ends with the Night they love so well; and ere Day, the everlasting conqueror, wave his flaming standard in the luminous East, solitude and silence will again reign in the ISLE OF FANTAISIE.

CHAPTER II

THE last and loudest chorus had died away, and the Islanders were pouring forth their libation to their great enemy the Sun, when suddenly a vast obscurity spread over the glowing West. They looked at each other, and turned pale, and the wine from their trembling goblets fell useless on the shore. The women were too frightened to scream, and, for the first time in the Isle of Fantaisie, silence existed after sunset. They were encouraged when they observed that the darkness ceased at that point in the heavens which overlooked their coral rocks; and perceiving that their hitherto unsullied sky was pure, even at this moment of otherwise universal gloom, the men regained their colour, touched the goblets with their lips, further to reanimate themselves, and the women, now less discomposed, uttered loud shrieks.

Suddenly the wind roared with unaccustomed rage, the sea rose into large billows, and a ship was seen tossing in the offing. The Islanders, whose experience of navigation extended only to a slight paddling in their lagoon, in the half of a hollow trunk of a tree, for the purpose of fishing, mistook the tight little frigate for a great fish; and being now aware of the cause of this disturbance, and at the same time feeling confident that the monster could never make way through the shallow waters to the island, they recovered their courage, and gazed upon the labouring leviathan with the same interested nonchalance with which students at a modern lecture observe an expounding philosopher.

"What a shadow he casts over the sky!" said the King, a young man, whose divine right was never questioned by his female subjects. "What a commotion in the waters, and what a wind he snorts forth! It certainly must be the largest fish that exists. I remember my father telling me that a monstrous fish once got entangled among our rocks, and this part of the island really smelt for a month; I cannot help fancying that there is a rather odd smell now; pah!"

A favourite Queen flew to the suffering monarch, and pressing her aromatic lips upon his offended nostrils, his Majesty recovered.

The unhappy crew of the frigate, who, with the aid of their telescopes, had detected the crowds upon the shore, now fired their signal guns of distress, which came sullenly booming through the wind.

"Oh! the great fish is speaking!" was the universal exclamation.

"I begin to get frightened," said the favourite Queen. "I am sure the monster is coming here!" So saying, her Majesty grasped up a handful of pearls from the shore, to defend herself.

As screaming was now the fashion, all the women of course screamed; and animated by the example of their sovereign, and armed with the marine gems, the Amazons assumed an imposing attitude.

Just at the moment that they had worked up their enthusiasm to the highest pitch, and were actually desirous of dying for their country, the ship sunk.

CHAPTER III

It is the flush of noon; and, strange to say, a human figure is seen wandering on the shore of the Isle of Fantaisie.

"One of the crew of the wrecked frigate, of course? What an escape! Fortunate creature! interesting man! Probably the indefatigable Captain Parry; possibly the undaunted Captain Franklin; perhaps the adventurous Captain Lyon!"

No! sweet blue-eyed girl! my plots are not of that extremely guessable nature so admired by your adorable sex. Indeed, this book is so constructed that if you were even, according to custom, to commence its perusal by reading the last page, you would not gain the slightest assistance in finding out "how the story ends."

The wanderer belongs to no frigate-building nation. He is a true Fantaisian; who, having, in his fright, during yesterday's storm, lost the lock of hair which, in a moment of glorious favour, he had ravished from his fair mistress's brow, is now, after a sleepless night, tracing every remembered haunt of yesterday, with the fond hope of regaining his most precious treasure. Ye Gentlemen of England, who live at home at ease, know full well the anxiety and exertion, the days of management, and the nights of meditation which the rape of a lock requires, and you can consequently sympathise with the agitated feelings of the handsome and the hapless Popanilla.

The favourite of all the women, the envy of all the men, Popanilla passed a pleasant life. No one was a better judge of wine, no one had a better taste for fruit, no one danced with more elegant vivacity, and no one whispered compliments in a more meaning tone. His stories ever had a point, his repartees were never ill-natured. What a pity that such an amiable fellow should have got into such a scrape!

In spite of his grief, however, Popanilla soon found that the ardency of his passion evaporated under a smoking sun; and, exhausted, he was about to return home from his fruitless search, when his attention was attracted by a singular appearance. He observed before him, on the shore, a square and hitherto unseen form. He watched it for some minutes, but it was motionless. He drew nearer, and observed it with intense attention; but, if it were a being, it certainly was fast asleep. He approached close to its side, but it neither moved nor breathed. He applied his nose to the mysterious body, and the elegant Fantaisian drew back immediately from a most villainous smell of pitch. Not to excite too much, in this calm age, the reader's curiosity, let him know at once that this strange substance was a sea-chest. Upon it was marked, in large black letters, S. D. K. No. 1.

For the first time in his life Popanilla experienced a feeling of overwhelming curiosity. His fatigue, his loss, the scorching hour, and the possible danger were all forgotten in an indefinite feeling that the body possessed contents more interesting than its unpromising exterior, and in a resolute determination that the development of the mystery should be reserved only for himself.

Although he felt assured that he must be unseen, he could not refrain from throwing a rapid glance of anxiety around him. It was a moment of perfect stillness: the island slept in sunshine, and even the waves had ceased to break over the opposing rocks. A thousand strange and singular thoughts rushed into his mind, but his first purpose was ever uppermost; and at length, unfolding his girdle of skin, he tied the tough cincture round the chest, and, exerting all his powers, dragged his mysterious waif into the nearest wood.

But during this operation the top fell off, and revealed the neatest collection of little packages that ever pleased the eye of the admirer of spruce arrangement. Popanilla took up packets upon all possible subjects; smelt them, but they were not savoury; he was sorely puzzled. At last, he lighted on a slender volume bound in brown calf, which, with the confined but sensual notions of a savage, he mistook for gingerbread, at last. It was "The Universal Linguist, by Mr. Hamilton; or, the Art of Dreaming in Languages."

No sooner had Popanilla passed that well-formed nose, which had been so often admired by the lady whose lock of hair he had unfortunately lost, a few times over a few pages of the Hamiltonian System than he sank upon his bed of flowers, and, in spite of his curiosity, was instantly overcome by a profound slumber. But his slumber, though deep, was not peaceful, and he was the actor in an agitating drama.

He found himself alone in a gay and glorious garden. In the centre of it grew a pomegranate tree of prodigious size; its top was lost in the sky, and its innumerable branches sprang out in all directions, covered with large fruit of a rich golden hue. Beautiful birds were perched upon all parts of the tree, and chanted with perpetual melody the beauties of their bower. Tempted by the delicious sight, Popanilla stretched forward his ready hand to pluck; but no sooner had he grasped the fruit than the music immediately ceased, the birds rushed away, the sky darkened, the tree fell under the wind, the garden vanished, and Popanilla found himself in the midst of a raging sea, buffeting the waves.

He would certainly have been drowned had he not been immediately swallowed up by the huge monster which had not only been the occasion of the storm of yesterday, but, ah! most unhappy business! been the occasion also of his losing that lock of hair.

Ere he could congratulate himself on his escape he found fresh cause for anxiety, for he perceived that he was no longer alone. No friends were near him; but, on the contrary, he was surrounded by strangers of a far different aspect. They were men certainly; that is to say, they had legs and arms, and heads, and bodies as himself; but instead of that bloom of youth, that regularity of feature, that amiable joyousness of countenance, which he had ever been accustomed to meet and to love in his former companions, he recoiled in horror from the swarthy complexions, the sad visages, and the haggard features of his present ones. They spoke to him in a harsh and guttural accent. He would have fled from their advances; but then he was in the belly of a whale! When he had become a little used to their tones he was gratified by finding that their attentions were far from hostile; and, after having received from them a few compliments, he began to think that they were not quite so ugly. He discovered that the object of their inquiries was the fatal pomegranate which still remained in his hand. They admired its beauty, and told him that they greatly esteemed an individual who possessed such a mass of precious ore. Popanilla begged to undeceive them, and courteously presented the fruit. No sooner, however, had he parted with this apple of discord, than the countenances of his companions changed. Immediately discovering its real nature, they loudly accused Popanilla of having deceived them;

he remonstrated, and they recriminated; and the great fish, irritated by their clamour, lashed its huge tail, and with one efficacious vomit spouted the innocent Popanilla high in the air. He fell with such a dash into the waves that he was awakened by the sound of his own fall.

The dreamer awoke amidst real chattering, and scuffling, and clamour. A troop of green monkeys had been aroused by his unusual occupation, and had taken the opportunity of his slumber to become acquainted with some of the first principles of science. What progress they had made it is difficult to ascertain; because, each one throwing a tract at Popanilla's head, they immediately disappeared. It is said, however, that some monkeys have been since seen skipping about the island, with their tails cut off; and that they have even succeeded in passing themselves off for human beings among those people who do not read novels, and are consequently unacquainted with mankind.

The morning's adventure immediately rushed into Popanilla's mind, and he proceeded forthwith to examine the contents of his chest; but with advantages which had not been yet enjoyed by those who had previously peeped into it. The monkeys had not been composed to sleep by the "Universal Linguist" of Mr. Hamilton. As for Popanilla, he took up a treatise on hydrostatics, and read it straight through on the spot. For the rest of the day he was hydrostatically mad; nor could the commonest incident connected with the action or conveyance of water take place without his speculating on its cause and consequence.

So enraptured was Popanilla with his new accomplishments and acquirements that by degrees he avoided attendance on the usual evening assemblages, and devoted himself solely to the acquirement of useful knowledge. After a short time his absence was remarked; but the greatest and the most gifted has only to leave his coterie, called the world, for a few days, to be fully convinced of what slight importance he really is. And so Popanilla, the delight of society and the especial favourite of the women, was in a very short time not even inquired after. At first, of course, they supposed that he was in love, or that he had a slight cold, or that he was writing his memoirs; and as these suppositions, in due course, take their place in the annals of society as circumstantial histories, in about a week one knew the lady, another had heard him sneeze, and a third had seen the manuscript. At the end of another week Popanilla was forgotten.

CHAPTER IV

Six months had elapsed since the first chest of the cargo of Useful Knowledge destined for the fortunate Maldives had been digested by the recluse Popanilla; for a recluse he had now become. Great students are rather dull companions. Our Fantaisian friend, during his first studies, was as moody, absent, and querulous as are most men of genius during that mystical period of life. He was consequently avoided by the men and quizzed by the women, and consoled himself for the neglect of the first and the taunts of the second by the indefinite sensation that he should, some day or other, turn out that little being called a great man. As for his mistress, she considered herself insulted by being addressed by a man who had lost her lock of hair. When the chest was exhausted Popanilla was seized with a profound melancholy. Nothing depresses a man's spirits more completely than a self-conviction of self-conceit; and Popanilla, who had been accustomed to consider himself and his companions as the most elegant portion of the visible creation, now discovered, with dismay, that he and his fellow-islanders were nothing more than a horde of useless savages.

This mortification, however, was soon succeeded by a proud consciousness that he, at any rate, was now civilised; and that proud consciousness by a fond hope that in a short time he might become a civiliser. Like all projectors, he was not of a sanguine temperament; but he did trust that in the course of another season the Isle of Fantaisie might take its station among the nations. He was determined, however, not to be too rapid. It cannot be expected that ancient prejudices can in a moment be eradicated, and new modes of conduct instantaneously substituted and established. Popanilla, like a wise man, determined to conciliate. His views were to be as liberal, as his principles were enlightened. Men should be forced to do nothing. Bigotry, and intolerance, and persecution were the objects of his decided disapprobation; resembling, in this particular, all the great and good men who have ever existed, who have invariably maintained this opinion so long as they have been in the minority.

Popanilla appeared once more in the world.

"Dear me! is that you, Pop?" exclaimed the ladies. "What have you been doing with yourself all this time? Travelling, I suppose. Everyone travels now. Really you travelled men get quite bores. And where did you get that coat, if it be a coat?"

Such was the style in which the Fantaisian females saluted the long-absent Popanilla; and really, when a man shuts himself up from the world for a considerable time, and fancies that in condescending to re-enter it he has surely the right to expect the homage due to a superior being, these salutations are awkward. The ladies of England peculiarly excel in this species of annihilation; and while they continue to drown puppies, as they daily do, in a sea of sarcasm, I think no true Englishman will hesitate one moment in giving them the preference for tact and manner over all the vivacious French, all the self-possessing Italian, and all the tolerant German women. This is a clap-trap, and I have no doubt will sell the book.

Popanilla, however, had not re-entered society with the intention of subsiding into a nonentity; and he therefore took the opportunity, a few minutes after sunset, just as his companions were falling into the dance, to beg the favour of being allowed to address his sovereign only for one single moment.

"Sire!" said he, in that mild tone of subdued superciliousness with which we should always address kings, and which, while it vindicates our dignity, satisfactorily proves that we are above the vulgar passion of envy, "Sire!" but let us not encourage that fatal faculty of oratory so dangerous to free states, and therefore let us give only the "substance of Popanilla's speech." * He commenced his address in a manner somewhat resembling the initial observations of those pleasing pamphlets which are the fashion of the present hour; and which, being intended to diffuse information among those who have not enjoyed the opportunity and advantages of study, and are consequently of a gay and cheerful disposition, treat of light subjects in a light and polished style. Popanilla, therefore, spoke of man in a savage state, the origin of society, and the elements of the social compact, in sentences which would not have disgraced the mellifluous pen of Bentham. From these he naturally digressed into an agreeable disquisition on the Anglo-Saxons; and, after a little badinage on the Bill of Rights, flew off to an airy *aperçu* of the French Revolution. When he had arrived at the Isle of Fantaisie he begged to inform his Majesty that man was born for something else besides enjoying himself. It was, doubtless, extremely pleasant to dance and sing, to crown themselves with chaplets, and to drink wine; but he was "free to confess" that he did not imagine that the most barefaced hireling of corruption could for a moment presume to maintain that there was any utility in pleasure. If there were no utility in pleasure, it was quite clear that pleasure could profit no one. If, therefore, it were unprofitable, it was injurious; because that which does not produce a profit is equivalent to a loss; therefore pleasure is a losing business; consequently pleasure is not pleasant.

He also showed that man was not born for himself, but for society; that the interests of the body are alone to be considered, and not those of the individual; and that a nation might be extremely happy, extremely powerful, and extremely rich, although every individual member of it might at the same time be miserable, dependent, and in debt. He regretted to observe that no one in the island seemed in the slightest degree conscious of the object of his being. Man is created for a purpose; the object of his existence is to perfect himself. Man is imperfect by nature, because if nature had made him perfect he would have had no wants; and it is only by supplying his wants that utility can be developed. The development of utility is therefore the object of our being, and the attainment of this great end the cause of our existence. This principle clears all doubts, and rationally accounts for a state of existence which has puzzled many pseudo-philosophers.

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* *Substance of a speech*, in Parliamentary language, means a printed edition of an harangue which contains all that was uttered in the House, and about as much again.

Popanilla then went on to show that the hitherto received definitions of man were all erroneous; that man is neither a walking animal, nor a talking animal, nor a cooking animal, nor a lounging animal, nor a debt-incurring animal, nor a tax-paying animal, nor a printing animal, nor a puffing animal, but a *developing animal*. Development is the discovery of utility. By developing the water we get fish; by developing the earth we get corn, and cash, and cotton; by developing the air we get breath; by developing the fire we get heat. Thus, the use of the elements is demonstrated to the meanest capacity. But it was not merely a material development to which he alluded; a moral development was equally indispensable. He showed that it was impossible for a nation either to think too much or to do too much. The life of a man was therefore to be passed in a moral and material development until he had consummated his perfection. It was the opinion of Popanilla that this great result was by no means so near at hand as some philosophers flattered themselves; and that it might possibly require another half-century before even the most civilised nation could be said to have completed the destiny of the human race. At the same time, he intimated that there were various extraordinary means by which this rather desirable result might be facilitated; and there was no saying what the building of a new University might do, of which, when built, he had no objection to being appointed Principal.

In answer to those who affect to admire that deficient system of existence which they style simplicity of manners, and who are perpetually committing the blunder of supposing that every advance towards perfection only withdraws man further from his primitive and proper condition, Popanilla triumphantly demonstrated that no such order as that which they associated with the phrase "state of nature" ever existed. "Man," said he, "is called the masterpiece of nature; and man is also, as we all know, the most curious of machines; now, a machine is a work of art, consequently, the masterpiece of nature is the masterpiece of art. The object of all mechanism is the attainment of utility; the object of man, who is the most perfect machine, is utility in the highest degree. Can we believe, therefore, that this machine was ever intended for a state which never could have called forth its powers, a state in which no utility could ever have been attained, a state in which there are no wants; consequently, no demand; consequently, no supply; consequently, no competition; consequently, no invention; consequently, no profits; only one great pernicious monopoly of comfort and ease? Society without wants is like a world without winds. It is quite clear, therefore, that there is no such thing as nature; nature is art, or art is nature; that which is most useful is most natural, because utility is the test of nature; therefore a steam-engine is in fact a much more natural production than a mountain.*

"You are convinced, therefore," he continued, "by these observations, that it is impossible for an individual or a nation to be too artificial in their manners, their ideas, their laws, or their general policy; because, in fact, the more artificial you become the nearer you approach that state of nature of which you are so perpetually talking." Here observing that some of his audience appeared to be a little sceptical, perhaps only surprised, he told them that what he said must be true, because it entirely consisted of first principles.†

After having thus preliminarily descanted for about two hours, Popanilla informed his Majesty that he was unused to public speaking, and then proceeded to show that the grand characteristic of the social action ‡ of the Isle of Fantaisie was a total want of development. This he observed with equal sorrow and surprise; he respected the wisdom of their ancestors; at the same time, no one could deny that they were both barbarous and ignorant; he highly esteemed also the constitution, but regretted that it was not in the slightest degree adapted to the existing want of society: he was not for destroying any establishments, but, on the contrary, was for courteously affording them the opportunity of self-dissolution. He finished by re-urging, in strong terms, the immediate development of the island. In the first place, a great metropolis must be instantly built, because a great metropolis always produces a great demand; and, moreover, Popanilla had some legal doubts whether a country without a capital could in fact be considered a State. Apologising for having so long trespassed upon the attention of the assembly, he begged distinctly to state * that he had no wish to see his Majesty and his fellow-subjects adopt these new principles without examination and without experience. They might commence on a small scale; let them cut down their forests, and by turning them into ships and houses, discover the utility of timber; let the whole island be dug up; let canals be cut, docks be built, and all the elephants be killed directly, that their teeth might yield an immediate article for exportation. A short time would afford a sufficient trial. In the meanwhile, they would not be pledged to further measures, and these might be considered "only as an experiment." † Taking for granted that these principles would be acted on, and taking into consideration the site of the island in the map of the world, the nature and extent of its resources, its magnificent race of human beings, its varieties of the animal creation, its wonderfully fine timber, its undeveloped mineral treasures, the spaciousness of its harbours, and its various facilities for extended international communication, Popanilla had no hesitation in saying that a short time could not elapse ere, instead of passing their lives in a state of unprofitable ease and useless enjoyment, they might reasonably expect to be the terror and astonishment of the universe, and to be able to annoy every nation of any consequence.

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* The age seems as anti-mountainous as it is anti-monarchical. A late writer insinuates that if the English had spent their millions in levelling the Andes, instead of excavating the table-lands, society might have been benefited. These monstrosities are decidedly useless, and therefore can neither be sublime nor beautiful, as has been unanswerably demonstrated by another recent writer on political æsthetics.—See also a personal attack on Mont Blanc, in the second number of the *Foreign Quarterly Review*, 1828.

† First principles are the ingredients of positive truth. They are immutable, as may be seen by comparing the first principles of the eighteenth century with the first principles of the nineteenth.

‡ This simple and definite phrase we derive from the nation to whom we were indebted during the last century for some other phrases about as definite, but rather more dangerous.

Here, observing a smile upon his Majesty's countenance, Popanilla told the King that he was only a chief magistrate, and he had no more right to laugh at him than a parish constable. He concluded by observing that although what he at present urged might appear strange, nevertheless, if the listeners had been acquainted with the characters and cases of Galileo and Turgot, they would then have seen, as a necessary consequence, that his system was perfectly correct, and he himself a man of extraordinary merit.

Here the chief magistrate, no longer daring to smile, burst into a fit of laughter; and turning to his courtiers said: "I have not an idea what this man is talking about, but I know that he makes my head ache: give me a cup of wine, and let us have a dance."

All applauded the royal proposition; and pushing Popanilla from one to another, until he was fairly hustled to the brink of the lagoon, they soon forgot the existence of this bore: in one word, he was cut. When Popanilla found himself standing alone, and looking grave while all the rest were gay, he began to suspect that he was not so influential a personage as he previously imagined. Rather crest-fallen,

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* Another phrase of Parliament, which, I need not observe, is always made use of in oratory when the orator can see his meaning about as distinctly as Sancho perceived the charms of Dulcinea.

† A very famous and convenient phrase this—but in politics *experiments* mean *revolutions*. 1828.

he sneaked home; and consoled himself for having nobody to speak to by reading some amusing "Conversations on Political Economy."

CHAPTER V

POPANILLA was discomposed, but he was not discomfited. He consoled himself for the Royal neglect by the recollection of the many illustrious men who had been despised, banished, imprisoned, and burnt for the maintenance of opinions which, centuries afterwards, had been discovered to be truth. He did not forget that in still further centuries the lately recognised truth had been re-discovered to be falsehood; but then these men were not less illustrious; and what wonder that their opinions were really erroneous, since they were not his present ones? The reasoning was equally conclusive and consolatory. Popanilla, therefore, was not discouraged; and although he deemed it more prudent not to go out of his way to seek another audience of his sovereign, or to be too anxious again to address a public meeting, he nevertheless determined to proceed cautiously, but constantly, propagating his doctrines and proselytising in private.

Unfortunately for Popanilla, he did not enjoy one advantage which all founders of sects have duly appreciated, and by which they have been materially assisted. It is a great and an unanswerable argument in favour of a Providence that we constantly perceive that the most beneficial results are brought about by the least worthy and most insignificant agents. The purest religions would never have been established had they not been supported by sinners who felt the burthen of the old faith; and the most free and enlightened governments are often generated by the discontented, the disappointed, and the dissolute. Now, in the Isle of Fantaisie, unfortunately for our revolutioniser, there was not a single grumbler.

Unable, therefore, to make the bad passions of his fellow-creatures the unconscious instruments of his good purposes, Popanilla must have been contented to have monopolised all the wisdom of the moderns, had he not, with the unbaffled wit of an inventor, hit upon a new expedient. Like Socrates, our philosopher began to cultivate with sedulousness the society of youth.

In a short time the ladies of Fantaisie were forced to observe that the fair sex most unfashionably predominated in their evening assemblages; for the young gentlemen of the island had suddenly ceased to pay their graceful homage at the altar of Terpsichore. In an Indian isle not to dance was as bad as heresy. The ladies rallied the recreants, but their playful sarcasms failed of their wonted effect. In the natural course of things they had recourse to remonstrances, but their appeals were equally fruitless. The delicate creatures tried reproaches, but the boyish cynics received them with a scowl and answered them with a sneer.

The women fled in indignation to their friendly monarch; but the voluptuary of nature only shrugged his shoulders and smiled. He kissed away their tears, and their frowns vanished as he crowned their long hair with roses.

"If the lads really show such bad taste," said his Majesty, "why I and my lords must do double duty, and dance with a couple of you at once." Consoled and complimented, and crowned by a King, who could look sad? The women forgot their anger in their increasing loyalty.

But the pupils of Popanilla had no sooner mustered the first principles of science than they began to throw off their retired habits and uncommunicative manners. Being not utterly ignorant of some of the rudiments of knowledge, and consequently having completed their education, it was now their duty, as members of society, to instruct and not to study. They therefore courted, instead of shunned, their fellow-creatures; and on all occasions seized all opportunities of assisting the spread of knowledge. The voices of lecturing boys resounded in every part of the island. Their tones were so shrill, their manners so presuming, their knowledge so crude, and their general demeanour so completely unamiable, that it was impossible to hear them without delight, advantage, and admiration.

The women were not now the only sufferers and the only complainants. Dinned to death, the men looked gloomy; and even the King, for the first time in his life, looked grave. Could this Babel, he thought, be that empire of bliss, that delightful Fantaisie, where to be ruler only proved that you were the most skilful in making others happy! His brow ached under his light flowery crown, as if it were bound by the barbarous circle of a tyrant, heavy with gems and gold. In his despair he had some thoughts of leaving his kingdom and betaking himself to the mermaids.

The determination of the most precious portion of his subjects saved his empire. As the disciples of the new school were daily demanding, "What is the use of dancing? what is the use of drinking wine? what is the use of smelling flowers?" the women, like prescient politicians, began to entertain a nervous suspicion that in time these sages might even presume to question the utility of that homage which, in spite of the Grecian Philosophers and the British Essayists, we have been in the habit of conceding to them ever since Eden; and they rushed again to the King like frightened deer. Something now was to be done; and the monarch, with an expression of countenance which almost amounted to energy, whispered consolation.

The King sent for Popanilla; the message produced a great sensation; the enlightened introducer of the new principles had not been at Court since he was cut. No doubt his Majesty was at last impregnated with the liberal spirit of the age; and Popanilla was assuredly to be Premier. In fact, it must be so; he was "sent for"; there was no precedent in Fantaisie, though there might be in other islands, for a person being "sent for" and not being Premier. His disciples were in high spirits; the world was now to be regulated upon right principles, and they were to be installed into their right places.

"Illustrious Popanilla!" said the King, "you once did me the honour of making me a speech which, unfortunately for myself, I candidly confess, I was then incapable of understanding; no wonder, as it was the first I ever heard. I shall not, however, easily forget the effect which it produced upon me. I have since considered it my duty, as a monarch, to pay particular attention to your suggestions. I now understand them with sufficient clearness to be fully convinced of their excellence, and in future I intend to act upon them, without any exception or deviation. To prove my sincerity, I have determined to commence the new system at once; and as I think that, without some extension of our international relations, the commercial interest of this island will be incapable of furnishing the taxes which I intend to levy, I have determined, therefore, to fit out an expedition for the purpose of discovering new islands and forming relations with new islanders. It is but due to your merit that you should be appointed to the command of it; and further to testify my infinite esteem for your character, and my complete confidence in your abilities, I make you post-captain on the spot. As the axiom of your school seems to be that everything can be made perfect at once, without time, without experience, without practice, and without preparation, I have no doubt, with the aid of a treatise or two, you will make a consummate naval commander, although you have never been at sea in the whole course of your life. Farewell, Captain Popanilla!"

No sooner was this adieu uttered than four brawny lords of the bedchamber seized the Turgot of Fantaisie by the shoulders, and carried him with inconceivable rapidity to the shore. His pupils, who would have fled to his rescue, were stifled with the embraces of their former partners, and their utilitarianism dissolved in the arms of those they once so rudely rejected. As for their tutor, he was thrust into one of the canoes, with some fresh water, bread-fruit, dried fish, and a basket of alligator-pears. A band of mermaids carried the canoe with exquisite management through the shallows and over the breakers, and poor Popanilla in a few minutes found himself out at sea. Tremendously frightened, he offered to recant all his opinions, and denounce as traitors any individuals whom the Court might select. But his former companions did not exactly detect the utility of his return. His offers, his supplications, were equally fruitless; and the only answer which floated to him on the wind was, "Farewell, Captain Popanilla!"

CHAPTER VI

NIGHT fell upon the waters, dark and drear, and thick and misty. How unlike those brilliant hours that once summoned him to revelry and love! Unhappy Popanilla! Thy delicious Fantaisie has vanished! Ah, pitiable youth! What could possibly have induced you to be so very rash? And all from that unlucky lock of hair!

After a few natural paroxysms of rage, terror, anguish, and remorse, the Captain as naturally subsided into despair, and awaited with sullen apathy that fate which could not be far distant. The only thing which puzzled the philosophical navigator was his inability to detect what useful end could be attained by his death. At length, remembering that fish must be fed, his theory and his desperation were at the same time confirmed.

A clear, dry morning succeeded the wet, gloomy night, and Popanilla had not yet gone down. This extraordinary suspension of his fate roused him from his stupor, and between the consequent excitement and the morning air he acquired an appetite. Philosophical physicians appear to have agreed that sorrow, to a certain extent, is not unfavourable to digestion; and as Popanilla began to entertain some indefinite and unreasonable hopes, the alligator-pears quickly disappeared. In the meantime the little canoe cut her way as if she were chasing a smuggler; and had it not been for a shark or two who, in anticipation of their services being required, never left her side for a second, Popanilla really might have made some ingenious observations on the nature of tides. He was rather surprised, certainly, as he watched his frail bark cresting the waves; but he soon supposed that this was all in the natural course of things; and he now ascribed his previous fright, not to the peril of his situation, but to his inexperience of it.

Although his apprehension of being drowned was now removed, yet when he gazed on the boundless vacancy before him, and also observed that his provisions rapidly decreased, he began to fear that he was destined for a still more horrible fate, and that, after having eaten his own shoes, he must submit to be starved. In this state of despondency, with infinite delight and exultation he clearly observed, on the second day, at twenty-seven minutes past three P.M., though at a considerable distance, a mountain and an island. His joy and his pride were equal, and excessive: he called the first Alligator Mountain, in gratitude to the pears; and christened the second after his mistress, that unlucky mistress! The swift canoe soon reached the discoveries, and the happy discoverer further found, to his mortification, that the mountain was a mist and the island a seaweed. Popanilla now grew sulky, and threw himself down in the bottom of his boat.

On the third morning he was awakened by a tremendous roar; on looking around him he perceived that he was in a valley formed by two waves, each several hundred feet high. This seemed the crisis of his fate; he shut his eyes, as people do when they are touched by a dentist, and in a few minutes was still bounding on the ocean in the eternal canoe, safe but senseless. Some tremendous peals of thunder, a roaring wind, and a scathing lightning confirmed his indisposition; and had not the tempest subsided, Popanilla would probably have been an idiot for life. The dead and soothing calm which succeeded this tornado called him back again gradually to existence. He opened his eyes, and, scarcely daring to try a sense, immediately shut them; then heaving a deep sigh, he shrugged his shoulders, and looked as pitiable as a prime minister with a rebellious cabinet. At length he ventured to lift up his head; there was not a wrinkle on the face of ocean; a halcyon fluttered over him, and then scudded before his canoe, and gamesome porpoises were tumbling at his side. The sky was cloudless, except in the direction to which he was driving; but even as Popanilla observed, with some misgivings, the mass of vapours which had there congregated, the great square and solid black clouds drew off like curtains, and revealed to his entranced vision a magnificent city rising out of the sea.

Tower, and dome, and arch, column, and spire, and obelisk, and lofty terraces, and many-windowed palaces, rose in all directions from a mass of buildings which appeared to him each instant to grow more huge, till at length it seemed to occupy the whole horizon. The sun lent additional lustre to the dazzling quays of white marble which apparently surrounded this mighty city, and which rose immediately from the dark blue waters. As the navigator drew nearer, he observed that in most parts the quays were crowded with beings who, he trusted, were human, and already the hum of multitudes broke upon his inexperienced ear: to him a sound far more mysterious and far more exciting than the most poetical of winds to the most windy of poets. On the right of this vast city rose what was mistaken by Popanilla for an immense but leafless forest; but more practical men than the Fantaisian Captain have been equally confounded by the first sight of a million of masts.

The canoe cut its way with increased rapidity, and ere Popanilla had recovered himself sufficiently to make even an ejaculation, he found himself at the side of a quay. Some amphibious creatures, whom he supposed to be mermen, immediately came to his assistance, rather stared at his serpent-skin coat, and then helped him up the steps. Popanilla was instantly surrounded.

"Who are you?" said one.

"What are you?" asked another.

"Who is it?" exclaimed a third.

"What is it?" screamed a fourth.

"My friends, I am a man!"

"A man!" said the women; "are you sure you are a real man?"

"He must be a sea-god!" said the females.

"She must be a sea-goddess!" said the males.

"A Triton!" maintained the women.

"A Nereid!" argued the men.

"It is a great fish!" said the boys.

Thanks to the Universal Linguist, Captain Popanilla, under these peculiar circumstances, was more loquacious than could have been Captain Parry.

"Good people! you see before you the most injured of human beings."

This announcement inspired general enthusiasm. The women wept, the men shook hands with him, and all the boys huzzaed. Popanilla proceeded:

"Actuated by the most pure, the most patriotic, the most noble, the most enlightened, and the most useful sentiments, I aspired to ameliorate the condition of my fellow-men. To this grand object I have sacrificed all that makes life delightful: I have lost my station in society, my taste for dancing, my popularity with the men, my favour with the women; and last, but, oh! not least (excuse this emotion), I have lost a very particular lock of hair. In one word, my friends, you see before you, banished, ruined, and unhappy, the victim of a despotic sovereign, a corrupt aristocracy, and a misguided people."

No sooner had he ceased speaking than Popanilla really imagined that he had only escaped the dangers of sedition and the sea to expire by less hostile, though not less effective, means. To be strangled was not much better than to be starved: and certainly, with half-a-dozen highly respectable females clinging round his neck, he was not reminded for the first time in his life what a domestic bowstring is an affectionate woman. In an agony of suffocation he thought very little of his arms, although the admiration of the men had already, in his imagination, separated these useful members from his miserable body; and had it not been for some justifiable kicking and plunging, the veneration of the ingenuous and surrounding youth, which manifested itself by their active exertions to divide his singular garment into relics of a martyr of liberty, would soon have effectually prevented the ill-starred Popanilla from being again mistaken for a Nereid. Order was at length restored, and a committee of eight appointed to regulate the visits of the increasing mob.

The arrangements were judicious; the whole populace was marshalled into ranks; classes of twelve persons were allowed consecutively to walk past the victim of tyranny, corruption, and ignorance; and each person had the honour to touch his finger. During this proceeding, which lasted a few hours, an influential personage generously offered to receive the eager subscriptions of the assembled thousands. Even the boys subscribed, and ere six hours had passed since his arrival as a coatless vagabond in this liberal city, Captain Popanilla found himself a person of considerable means.

The receiver of the subscriptions, while he crammed Popanilla's serpent-skin pockets full of gold pieces, at the same time kindly offered the stranger to introduce him to an hotel. Popanilla, who was quite beside himself, could only bow his assent, and mechanically accompanied his conductor. When he had regained his faculty of speech, he endeavoured, in wandering sentences of grateful incoherency, to express his deep sense of this unparalleled liberality. "It was an excess of generosity in which mankind could never have before indulged!"

"By no means!" said his companion, with great coolness; "far from this being an unparalleled affair, I assure you it is a matter of hourly occurrence: make your mind quite easy. You are probably not aware that you are now living in the richest and the most charitable country in the world?"

"Wonderful!" said Popanilla; "and what is the name, may I ask, of this charitable city?"

"Is it possible," said his companion, with a faint smile, "that you are ignorant of the great city of Hubbabub; the largest city not only that exists, but that ever did exist, and the capital of the island of Vraibleusia, the most famous island not only that is known, but that ever was known?"

While he was speaking they were accosted by a man upon crutches, who, telling them in a broken voice that he had a wife and twelve infant children dependent on his support, supplicated a little charity. Popanilla was about to empty part of his pocketfuls into the mendicant's cap, but his companion repressed his unphilosophical facility. "By no means!" said his friend, who, turning round to the beggar, advised him, in a mild voice, to *work;* calmly adding, that if he presumed to ask charity again he should certainly have him bastinadoed. Then they walked on.

Popanilla's attention was so distracted by the variety, the number, the novelty, and the noise of the objects which were incessantly hurried upon his observation, that he found no time to speak; and as his companion, though exceedingly polite, was a man of few words, conversation rather flagged.

At last, overwhelmed by the magnificence of the streets, the splendour of the shops, the number of human beings, the rattling of the vehicles, the dashing of the horses, and a thousand other sounds and objects, Popanilla gave loose to a loud and fervent wish that his hotel might have the good fortune of being situated in this interesting quarter.

"By no means!" said his companion; "we have yet much further to go. Far from this being a desirable situation for you, my friend, no civilised person is ever seen here; and had not the cause of civil and religious liberty fortunately called me to the water-side to-day, I should have lost the opportunity of showing how greatly I esteem a gentleman who has suffered so severely in the cause of national amelioration."

"Sir!" said Popanilla, "your approbation is the only reward which I ever shall desire for my exertions. You will excuse me for not quite keeping up with you; but the fact is, my pockets are so stuffed with cash that the action of my legs is greatly impeded."

"Credit me, my friend, that you are suffering from an inconvenience which you will not long experience in Hubbabub. Nevertheless, to remedy it at present, I think the best thing we can do is to buy a purse."

They accordingly entered a shop where such an article might be found, and taking up a small sack, for Popanilla was very rich, his companion inquired its price, which he was informed was four crowns. No sooner had the desired information been given than the proprietor of the opposite shop rushed in, and offered him the same article for three crowns. The original merchant, not at all surprised at the intrusion, and not the least apologising for his former extortion, then demanded two. His rival, being more than his match, he courteously dropped upon his knee, and requested his customer to accept the article gratis, for his sake. The generous dealer would infallibly have carried the day, had not his rival humbly supplicated the purchaser not only to receive his article as a gift, but also the compliment of a crown inside.

"What a terrible cheat the first merchant must have been!" said the puzzled Popanilla, as they proceeded on their way.

"By no means!" said his calm companion; "the purse was sufficiently cheap even at four crowns. This is not Cheatery; this is Competition!"

"What a wonderful nation, then, this must be, where you not only get purses gratis but even well loaded! What use, then, is all this heavy gold? It is a tremendous trouble to carry; I will empty the bag into this kennel, for money surely can be of no use in a city where, when in want of cash, you have only to go into a shop and buy a purse!"

"Your pardon!" said his companion; "far from this being the case, Vraibleusia is, without doubt, the dearest country in the world."

"If, then," said the inquisitive Popanilla, with great animation, "if, then, this country be the dearest in the world; if, how——"

"My good friend!" said his companion, "I really am the last person in the world to answer questions. All that I know is, that this country is extremely dear, and that the only way to get things cheap is to encourage Competition."

Here the progress of his companion was impeded for some time by a great crowd, which had assembled to catch a glimpse of a man who was to fly off a steeple, but who had not yet arrived. A chimney-sweeper observed to a scientific friend that probably the density of the atmosphere might prevent the intended volitation; and Popanilla, who, having read almost as many pamphlets as the observer, now felt quite at home, exceedingly admired the observation.

"He must be a very superior man, this gentleman in black!" said Popanilla to his companion.

"By no means! he is of the lowest class in society. But you are probably not aware that you are in the most educated country in the world."

"Delightful!" said Popanilla.

The Captain was exceedingly desirous of witnessing the flight of the Vraibleusian Dædalus, but his friend advised their progress. This, however, was not easy; and Popanilla, animated for the moment by his natural aristocratic disposition, and emboldened by his superior size and strength, began to clear his way in a manner which was more cogent than logical. The chimney-sweeper and his comrades were soon in arms, and Popanilla would certainly have been killed or ducked by this superior man and his friends, had it not been for the mild remonstrance of his conductor and the singular appearance of his costume.

"What could have induced you to be so imprudent?" said his rescuer, when they had escaped from the crowd.

"Truly," said Popanilla, "I thought that in a country where you may bastinado the wretch who presumes to ask you for alms, there could surely be no objection to my knocking down the scoundrel who dared to stand in my way."

"By no means!" said his friend, slightly elevating his eyebrows. "Here all men are equal. You are probably not aware that you are at present in the freest country in the world."

"I do not exactly understand you; what is this freedom?"

"My good friend, I really am the last person in the world to answer questions. Freedom is, in one word, Liberty: a kind of thing which you foreigners never can understand, and which mere theory can make no man understand. When you have been in the island a few weeks all will be quite clear to you. In the mean , do as others do, and never knock men down!"

CHAPTER VII

"ALTHOUGH we are yet some way from our hotel," remarked Popanilla's conductor, "we have now arrived at a part of the city where I can ease you, without difficulty, from your troublesome burthen; let us enter here!"

As he spoke, they stopped before a splendid palace, and proceeding through various halls full of individuals apparently intently busied, the companions were at last ushered into an apartment of smaller size, but of more elegant character. A personage of prepossessing appearance was lolling on a couch of an appearance equally prepossessing. Before him, on a table, were some papers, exquisite fruits, and some liqueurs. Popanilla was presented, and received with fascinating complaisance. His friend stated the object of their visit, and handed the sackful of gold to the gentleman on the sofa. The gentleman on the sofa ordered a couple of attendants to ascertain its contents. While this computation was going on he amused his guests by his lively conversation, and charmed Popanilla by his polished manners and easy civility. He offered him, during his stay in Vraibleusia, the use of a couple of equipages, a villa, and an opera-box; insisted upon sending to his hotel some pine-apples and some rare wine, and gave him a perpetual ticket to his picture-gallery. When his attendants had concluded their calculation, he ordered them to place Popanilla's precious metal in his treasury; and then, presenting the Captain with a small packet of pink shells, he kindly inquired whether he could be of any further use to him. Popanilla was loth to retire without his gold, of the utility of which, in spite of the conveniency of competition, he seemed to possess an instinctive conception; but as his friend rose and withdrew, he could do nothing less than accompany him; for, having now known him nearly half a day, his confidence in his honour and integrity was naturally unbounded.

"That was the King, of course?" said Popanilla, when they were fairly out of the palace.

"The King!" said the unknown, nearly surprised into an exclamation; "by no means!"

"And what then?"

"My good friend! is it possible that you have no bankers in your country?"

"Yes, it is very possible; but we have mermaids, who also give us shells which are pretty. What then are your bankers?"

"Really, my good friend, that is a question which I never remember having been asked before; but a banker is a man who—keeps our money for us."

"Ah! and he is bound, I suppose, to return your money when you choose?"

"Most assuredly!"

"He is, then, in fact, your servant: you must pay him handsomely, for him to live so well?"

"By no means! we pay him nothing."

"That is droll; he must be very rich then?"

"Really, my dear friend, I cannot say. Why, yes! I—I suppose he may be very rich!"

"'Tis singular that a rich man should take so much trouble for others!"

"My good friend! of course he lives by his trouble."

"Ah! How, then," continued the inquisitive Fantaisian, "if you do not pay him for his services, and he yet lives by them; how, I pray, does he acquire these immense riches?"

"Really, my good sir, I am, in truth, the very last man in the world to answer questions: he is a banker; bankers are always rich; but why they are, or how they are, I really never had time to inquire. But I suppose, if the truth were known, they must have very great opportunities."

"Ah! I begin to see," said Popanilla. "It was really very kind of him," continued the Captain, "to make me a present of these little pink shells: what would I not give to turn them into a necklace, and send it to a certain person at Fantaisie!"

"It would be a very expensive necklace," observed his companion, almost surprised. "I had no idea, I confess, from your appearance, that in your country they indulged in such expensive tastes in costume."

"Expensive!" said Popanilla. "We certainly have no such shells as these in Fantaisie; but we have much more beautiful ones. I should think, from their look, they must be rather common."

His conductor for the first time nearly laughed. "I forgot," said he, "that you could not be aware that these pink shells are the most precious coin of the land, compared with which those bits of gold with which you have recently parted are nothing; your whole fortune is now in that little packet. The fact is," continued the unknown, making an effort to communicate, "although we possess in this country more of the precious metals than all the rest of the world together, the quantity is nevertheless utterly disproportioned to the magnitude of our wealth and our wants. We have been, therefore, under the necessity of resorting to other means of representing the first and supplying the second; and, taking advantage of our insular situation, we have introduced these small pink shells, which abound all round the coast.

Being much more convenient to carry, they are in general circulation, and no genteel person has ever anything else in his pocket."

"Wonderful! But surely, then, it is no very difficult thing in this country to accumulate a fortune, since all that is necessary to give you every luxury of life is a stroll one morning of your existence along the beach?"

"By no means, my friend! you are really too rapid. The fact is, that no one has the power of originally circulating these shells but our Government; and if anyone, by any chance, choose to violate this arrangement, we make up for depriving him of his solitary walks on the shore by instant submersion in the sea."

"Then the whole circulation of the country is at the mercy of your Government?" remarked Popanilla, summoning to his recollection the contents of one of those shipwrecked *brochures* which had exercised so strange an influence on his destiny. "Suppose they do not choose to issue?"

"That is always guarded against. The mere quarterly payments of interest upon our national debt will secure an ample supply."

"Debt! I thought you were the richest nation in the world?"

"'Tis true; nevertheless, if there were a golden pyramid with a base as big as the whole earth and an apex touching the heavens, it would not supply us with sufficient metal to satisfy our creditors."

"But, my dear sir," exclaimed the perplexed Popanilla, "if this really be true, how then can you be said to be the richest nation in the world?"

"It is very simple. The annual interest upon our debt exceeds the whole wealth of the rest of the world; therefore we must be the richest nation in the world."

"'Tis true," said Popanilla; "I see I have yet much to learn. But with regard to these pink shells, how can you possibly create for them a certain standard of value? It is merely agreement among yourselves that fixes any value to them."

"By no means! you are so rapid! Each shell is immediately convertible into gold; of which metal, let me again remind you, we possess more than any other nation; but which, indeed, we only keep as a sort of dress coin, chiefly to indulge the prejudices of foreigners."

"But," said the perpetual Popanilla, "suppose every man who held a shell on the same day were to——"

"My good friend! I really am the last person in the world to give explanations. In Vraibleusia, we have so much to do that we have no time to think; a habit which only becomes nations who are not employed. You are now fast approaching the Great Shell Question; a question which, I confess, affects the interests of every man in this island more than any other; but of which, I must candidly own, every man in this island is more ignorant than of any other. No one, however, can deny that the system works well; and if anything at any time go wrong, why really Mr. Secretary Periwinkle is a wonderful man, and our most eminent conchologist. He, no doubt, will set it right; and if, by any chance, things are past even his management, why then, I suppose, to use our national motto, *something will turn up.*"

Here they arrived at the hotel. Having made every arrangement for the comfort and convenience of the Fantaisian stranger, Popanilla's conductor took his leave, previously informing him that his name was Skindeep; that he was a member of one of the largest families in the island; that, had he not been engaged to attend a lecture, he would have stayed and dined with him; but that he would certainly call upon him on the morrow.

Compared with his hotel the palace of his banker was a dungeon; even the sunset voluptuousness of Fantaisie was now remembered without regret in the blaze of artificial light and in the artificial gratification of desires which art had alone created. After a magnificent repast, his host politely inquired of Popanilla whether he would like to go to the Opera, the comedy, or a concert; but the Fantaisian philosopher was not yet quite corrupted; and, still inspired with a desire to acquire useful knowledge, he begged his landlord to procure him immediately a pamphlet on the Shell Question.

While his host was engaged in procuring this luxury, a man entered the room and told Popanilla that he had walked that day two thousand five hundred paces, and that the tax due to the Excise upon this promenade was fifty crowns. The Captain stared, and remarked to the excise-officer that he thought a man's paces were a strange article to tax. The excise officer, with great civility, answered that no doubt at first sight it might appear rather strange, but that it was the only article left untaxed in Vraibleusia; that there was a slight deficiency in the last quarter's revenue, and that therefore the Government had no alternative; that it was a tax which did not press heavily upon the individual, because the Vraibleusians were of a sedentary habit; that, besides, it was an opinion every day more received among the best judges that the more a man was taxed the richer he ultimately would prove; and he concluded by saying that Popanilla need not make himself uneasy about these demands, because, if he were ruined to-morrow, being a foreigner, he was entitled by the law of the land to five thousand a year; whereas he, the exciseman, being a native-born Vraibleusian, had no claims whatever upon the Government; therefore he hoped his honour would give him something to drink.

His host now entered with the "Novum Organon" of the great Periwinkle. While Popanilla devoured the lively pages of this treatise, he discovered that the system which had been so subtilely introduced by the Government, and which had so surprised him in the morning, had soon been adopted in private life; and although it was a drowning matter to pick up pink shells, still there was nothing to prevent the whole commerce of the country from being carried on by means of a system equally conchological. He found that the social action in every part of the island was regulated and assisted by this process. Oyster-shells were first introduced; mussel-shells speedily followed; and, as commerce became more complicate, they had even been obliged to have recourse to snail-shells. Popanilla retired to rest with admiration of the people who thus converted to the most useful purposes things apparently so useless. There was no saying now what might not be done even with a nutshell. It was evident that the nation who contrived to be the richest people in the world while they were over head and ears in debt must be fast approaching to a state of perfection. Finally, sinking to sleep in a bed of eiderdown, Popanilla was confirmed in his prejudices against a state of nature.

CHAPTER VIII

Skindeep called upon Popanilla on the following morning in an elegant equipage, and with great politeness proposed to attend him in a drive about the city.

The island of Vraibleusia is one hundred and fifty miles in circumference, two-thirds of which are covered by the city of Hubbabub. It contains no other city, town, or village. The rest of the island consists of rivers, canals, and railroads. Popanilla was surprised when he was informed that Hubbabub did not contain more than five millions of inhabitants; but his surprise was decreased when their journey occasionally lay through tracts of streets, consisting often of capacious mansions entirely tenantless. On seeking an explanation of this seeming desolation, he was told that the Hubbabubians were possessed by a frenzy of always moving westward; and that consequently great quarters of the city are perpetually deserted. Even as Skindeep was speaking their passage was stopped by a large caravan of carriages and wagons heavily laden with human creatures and their children and chattels. On Skindeep inquiring the cause of this great movement, he was informed by one on horseback, who seemed to be the leader of the horde, that they were the late dwellers in sundry squares and streets situated far to the east; that their houses having been ridiculed by an itinerant ballad-singer, the female part of the tribe had insisted upon immediately quitting their unfashionable fatherland; and that now, after three days' journey, they had succeeded in reaching the late settlement of a horde who had migrated to the extreme west.

Quitting regions so subject to revolutions and vicissitudes, the travellers once more emerged into quarters of a less transitory reputation; and in the magnificent parks, the broad streets, the ample squares, the palaces, the triumphal arches, and the theatres of occidental Hubbabub, Popanilla lost those sad and mournful feelings which are ever engendered by contemplating the gloomy relics of departed greatness. It was impossible to admire too much the architecture of this part of the city. The elevations were indeed imposing. In general, the massy Egyptian appropriately graced the attic stories, while the finer and more elaborate architecture of Corinth was placed on a level with the eye, so that its beauties might be more easily discovered. Spacious colonnades were flanked by porticoes, surmounted by domes; nor was the number of columns at all limited, for you occasionally met with porticoes of two tiers, the lower one of which consisted of three, the higher one of thirty columns. Pedestals of the purest Ionic Gothic were ingeniously intermixed with Palladian pediments; and the surging spire exquisitely harmonised with the horizontal architecture of the ancients. But perhaps, after all, the most charming effect was produced by the pyramids, surmounted by weathercocks.

Popanilla was particularly pleased by some chimneys of Caryatides, and did not for a moment hesitate in assenting to the assertion of Skindeep that the Vraibleusians were the most architectural nation in the world. True it was, they had begun late; their attention as a people having been, for a considerable time, attracted to much more important affairs; but they had compensated for their tardy attention by their speedy excellence.*

Before they returned home Skindeep led Popanilla to the top of a tower, from whence they had a complete view of the whole island. Skindeep particularly directed the Captain's attention to one spot, where flourished, as he said, the only cornfields in the country, which supplied the whole nation, and were the property of one individual. So unrivalled was his agricultural science that the vulgar only accounted for his admirable produce by a miraculous fecundity! The proprietor of these hundred golden acres was a rather mysterious sort of personage. He was an aboriginal inhabitant, and, though the only one of the aborigines in existence, had lived many centuries, and, to the consternation of some of the Vraibleusians and the exultation of others, exhibited no signs of decay. This awful being was without a name. When spoken of by his admirers he was generally described by such panegyrical periphrases as "soul of the country," "foundation of the State," "the only real, and true, and substantial being"; while, on the other hand, those who presumed to differ from those sentiments were in the habit of styling him "the dead weight," "the vampire," "the nightmare," and other titles equally complimentary. They also maintained that, instead of being either real or substantial, he was, in fact, the most flimsy and fictitious personage in the whole island; and then, lashing themselves up into metaphor, they would call him a meteor, or a vapour, or a great windy bubble, that would some day burst.

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* See a work which will be shortly published, entitled, "The difference detected between *Architecture* and *Parchitecture*, by Sansovino the Second."

The Aboriginal insisted that it was the common law of the land that the islanders should purchase their corn only of him. They grumbled, but he growled; he swore that it was the constitution of the country; that there was an uninterrupted line of precedents to confirm the claim; and that, if they did not approve of the arrangement, they and their fathers should not have elected to have settled, or presumed to have been spawned, upon his island. Then, as if he were not desirous of resting his claim on its mere legal merits, he would remind them of the superiority of his grain, and the impossibility of a scarcity, in the event of which calamity an insular people could always find a plentiful though temporary resource in seaweed. He then clearly proved to them that, if ever they had the imprudence to change any of their old laws, they would necessarily never have more than one meal a day as long as they lived. Finally, he recalled to their recollection that he had made the island what it was, that he was their mainstay, and that his counsel and exertions had rendered them the wonder of the world. Thus, between force, and fear, and flattery, the Vraibleusians paid for their corn nearly its weight in gold; but what did that signify to a nation with so many pink shells!

CHAPTER IX

The third day after his drive with his friend Skindeep, Popanilla was waited upon by the most eminent bookseller in Hubbabub, who begged to have the honour of introducing to the public a Narrative of Captain Popanilla's Voyage. This gentleman assured Popanilla that the Vraibleusian public were nervously alive to anything connected with discovery; that so ardent was their attachment to science and natural philosophy that voyages and travels were sure to be read with eagerness, particularly if they had coloured plates. Popanilla was charmed with the proposition, but blushingly informed the mercantile Mæcenas that he did not know how to write. The publisher told him that this circumstance was not of the slightest importance; that he had never for a moment supposed that so sublime a savage could possess such a vulgar accomplishment; and that it was by no means difficult for a man to publish his travels without writing a line of them.

Popanilla having consented to become an author upon these terms, the publisher asked him to dine with him, and introduced him to an intelligent individual. This intelligent individual listened attentively to all Popanilla's adventures. The Captain concealed nothing. He began with the eternal lock of hair, and showed how wonderfully this world was constituted, that even the loss of a thing was not useless; from which it was clear that Utility was Providence. After drinking some capital wine, the intelligent individual told Popanilla that he was wrong in supposing Fantaisie to be an island; that, on the contrary, it was a great continent; that this was proved by the probable action of the tides in the part of the island which had not yet been visited; that the consequence of these tides would be that, in the course of a season or two, Fantaisie would become a great receptacle for icebergs, and be turned into the North Pole; that, therefore, the seasons throughout the world would be changed; that this year, in Vraibleusia, the usual winter would be omitted, and that when the present summer was finished the dog-days would again commence. Popanilla took his leave highly delighted with this intelligent individual and with the bookseller's wine.

Owing to the competition which existed between the publishers, the printers, and the engravers of the city of Hubbabub, and the great exertions of the intelligent individual, the Narrative of Captain Popanilla's Voyage was brought out in less than a week, and was immediately in everybody's hand. The work contained a detailed account of everything which took place during the whole of the three days, and formed a quarto volume. The plates were numerous and highly interesting. There was a line engraving of Alligator Mountain and a mezzotint of Seaweed Island; a view of the canoe N.E.; a view of the canoe N.W.; a view of the canoe S.E.; a view of the canoe S.W. There were highly-finished coloured drawings of the dried fish and the bread-fruit, and an exquisitely tinted representation of the latter in a mouldy state. But the *chef-d'œuvre* was the portrait of the Author himself. He was represented trampling on the body of a boa constrictor of the first quality, in the skin of which he was dressed; at his back were his bow and arrows; his right hand rested on an uprooted pine-tree; he stood in a desert between two volcanoes; at his feet was a lake of magnitude; the distance lowered with an approaching tornado; but a lucky flash of lightning revealed the range of the Andes and both oceans. Altogether he looked the most dandified of savages, and the most savage of dandies. It was a sublime lithograph, and produced scarcely less important effects upon Popanilla's fortune than that lucky "lock of hair"; for no sooner was the portrait published than Popanilla received a ticket for the receptions of a lady of quality. On showing it to Skindeep, he was told that the honour was immense, and therefore he must go by all means. Skindeep regretted that he could not accompany him, but he was engaged to a lecture on shoemaking; and a lecture was a thing he made it a point never to miss, because, as he very properly observed, "By lectures you may become extremely well informed without any of the inconveniences of study. No fixity of attention, no continuity of meditation, no habits of reflection, no aptitude of combination, are the least requisite; all which things only give you a nervous headache; and yet you gain all the results of all these processes. True it is that that which is so easily acquired is not always so easily remembered; but what of that? Suppose you forget any subject, why then you go to another lecture." "Very true!" said Popanilla.

Popanilla failed not to remember his invitation from Lady Spirituelle; and at the proper hour his announcement produced a sensation throughout her crowded saloons. Spirituelle was a most enchanting lady; she asked Popanilla how tall he really was, and whether the women in Fantaisie were as handsome as the men. Then she said that the Vraibleusians were the most intellectual and the most scientific nation in the world, and that the society at her house was the most intellectual and the most scientific in Vraibleusia. She told him also that she had hoped by this season the world would have been completely regulated by mind; but that the subversion of matter was a more substantial business than she and the Committee of Management had imagined: she had no doubt, however, that in a short time mind must carry the day, because matter was mortal and mind eternal; therefore mind had the best chance. Finally, she also told him that the passions were the occasion of all the misery which had ever existed; and that it was impossible for mankind either to be happy or great until, like herself and her friends, they were "all soul."

Popanilla was charmed with his company. What a difference between the calm, smiling, easy, uninteresting, stupid, sunset countenances of Fantaisie and those around him. All looked so interested and so intelligent; their eyes were so anxious, their gestures so animated, their manners so earnest. They must be very clever! He drew nearer. If before he were charmed, now he was enchanted. What an universal acquisition of useful knowledge! Three or four dukes were earnestly imbibing a new theory of gas from a brilliant little gentleman in black, who looked like a Will-o'-the-wisp. The Prime Minister was anxious about pinmaking; a Bishop equally interested in a dissertation on the escapements of watches; a Field-Marshal not less intent on a new specific from the concentrated essence of hellebore. But what most delighted Popanilla was hearing a lecture from the most eminent lawyer and statesman in Vraibleusia on his first and favourite study of hydrostatics. His associations quite overcame him: all Fantaisie rushed upon his memory, and he was obliged to retire to a less frequented part of the room to relieve his too excited feelings.

He was in a few minutes addressed by the identical little gentleman who had recently been speculating with the three dukes.

The little gentleman told him that he had heard with great pleasure that in Fantaisie they had no historians, poets, or novelists. He proved to Popanilla that no such thing as experience existed; that, as the world was now to be regulated on quite different principles from those by which it had hitherto been conducted, similar events to those which had occurred could never again take place; and therefore it was absolutely useless to know anything about the past. With regard to literary fiction, he explained that, as it was absolutely necessary, from his nature, that man should experience a certain quantity of excitement, the false interest which these productions created prevented their readers from obtaining this excitement by methods which, by the discovery of the useful, might greatly benefit society.

"You are of opinion, then," exclaimed the delighted Popanilla, "that nothing is good which is not useful?"

"Is it possible that an individual exists in this world who doubts this great first principle?" said the little man, with great animation.

"Ah, my dear friend!" said Popanilla, "if you only knew what an avowal of this great first principle has cost me; what I have suffered; what I have lost!"

"What have you lost?" asked the little gentleman.

"In the first place, a lock of hair—"

"Poh, nonsense!"

"Ah! you may say Poh! but it was a particular lock of hair."

"My friend, that word is odious. Nothing is *particular*, everything is *general*. Rules are general, feelings are general, and property should be general; and, sir, I tell you what, in a very short time it must be so. Why should Lady Spirituelle, for instance, receive me at her house, rather than I receive her at mine?"

"Why don't you, then?" asked the simple Popanilla.

"Because I have not got one, sir!" roared the little gentleman.

He would certainly have broken away had not Popanilla begged him to answer one question. The Captain, reiterating in the most solemn manner his firm belief in the dogma that nothing was good which was not useful, and again detailing the persecutions which this conviction had brought upon him, was delighted that an opportunity was now afforded to gain from the lips of a distinguished philosopher a definition of what *utility* really was. The distinguished philosopher could not refuse so trifling a favour.

"Utility," said he, "is——"

At this critical moment there was a universal buzz throughout the rooms, and everybody looked so interested that the philosopher quite forgot to finish his answer. On inquiring the cause of this great sensation, Popanilla was informed that a rumour was about that a new element had been discovered that afternoon. The party speedily broke up, the principal philosophers immediately rushing to their clubs to ascertain the truth of this report. Popanilla was unfashionable enough to make his acknowledgments to his hostess before he left her house. As he gazed upon her ladyship's brilliant eyes and radiant complexion, he felt convinced of the truth of her theory of the passions; he could not refrain from pressing her hand in a manner which violated etiquette, and which a nativity in the Indian Ocean could alone excuse; the pressure was graciously returned. As Popanilla descended the staircase, he discovered a little note of pink satin paper entangled in his ruffle. He opened it with curiosity. It was "all soul." He did not return to his hotel quite so soon as he expected.

CHAPTER X

Popanilla breakfasted rather late the next morning, and on looking over the evening papers, which were just published, his eyes lighted on the following paragraph:

"Arrived yesterday at the Hôtel Diplomatique, His Excellency Prince Popanilla, Ambassador Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary from the newly-recognised State of Fantaisie."

Before his Excellency could either recover from his astonishment or make any inquiries which might throw any illustration upon its cause, a loud shout in the street made him naturally look out of the window. He observed three or four magnificent equipages drawing up at the door of the hotel, and followed by a large crowd. Each carriage was drawn by four horses, and attended by footmen so radiant with gold and scarlet that, had Popanilla been the late ingenious Mr. Keates, he would have mistaken them for the natural children of Phœbus and Aurora. The Ambassador forgot the irregularity of the paragraph in the splendour of the liveries. He felt triumphantly conscious that the most beautiful rose in the world must look extremely pale by the side of scarlet cloth; and this new example of the superiority of art over nature reminding him of the inferiority of bread-fruit to grilled muffin, he resolved to return to breakfast.

But it was his fate to be reminded of the inutility of the best resolutions, for ere the cup of coffee had touched his parched lips the door of his room flew open, and the Marquess of Moustache was announced.

His Lordship was a young gentleman with an expressive countenance; that is to say, his face was so covered with hair, and the back of his head cropped so bald, that you generally addressed him in the rear by mistake. He did not speak, but continued bowing for a considerable time, in that diplomatic manner which means so much. By the time he had finished bowing his suite had gained the apartment, and his Private Secretary, one of those uncommonly able men who only want an opportunity, seized the present one of addressing Popanilla.

Bowing to the late Captain with studied respect, he informed him that the Marquess Moustache was the nobleman appointed by the Government of Vraibleusia to attend upon his Excellency during the first few weeks of his mission, with the view of affording him all information upon those objects which might naturally be expected to engage the interest or attract the attention of so distinguished a personage. The *ancien marin* and present Ambassador had been so used to miracles since the loss of that lock of hair, that he did not think it supernatural, having during the last few days been in turn a Faintaisian nobleman, a post-captain, a fish, a goddess, and, above all, an author, he should now be transformed into a plenipotentiary. Drinking, therefore, his cup of coffee, he assumed an air as if he really were used to have a Marquess for an attendant, and said that he was at his Lordship's service.

The Marquess bowed low, and the Private Secretary remarked that the first thing to be done by his Excellency was to be presented to the Government. After that he was to visit all the manufactories in Vraibleusia, subscribe to all the charities, and dine with all the Corporations, attend a *déjeûner à la fourchette* at a palace they were at present building under the sea, give a gold plate to be run for on the fashionable racecourse, be present at morning prayers at the Government Chapel, hunt once or twice, give a dinner or two himself, make one pun, and go to the Play, by which various means, he said, the good understanding between the two countries would be materially increased and, in a manner, established.

As the Fantaisian Ambassador and his suite entered their carriages, the sky, if it had not been for the smoke, would certainly have been rent by the acclamations of the mob. "Popanilla for ever!" sounded from all quarters, except where the shout was varied by "Vraibleusia and Fantaisie against the world!" which perhaps was even the most popular sentiment of the two. The Ambassador was quite agitated, and asked the Marquess what he was to do. The Private Secretary told his Excellency to bow. Popanilla bowed with such grace that in five minutes the horses were taken out of his carriage, and that carriage dragged in triumph by the enthusiastic populace. He continued bowing, and their enthusiasm continued increasing. In the meantime his Excellency's portrait was sketched by an artist who hung upon his wheel, and in less than half an hour a lithographic likeness of the popular idol was worshipped in every print-shop in Hubbabub.

As they drew nearer the Hall of Audience the crowd kept increasing, till at length the whole city seemed poured forth to meet him. Although now feeling conscious that he was the greatest man in the island, and therefore only thinking of himself, Popanilla's attention was nevertheless at this moment attracted by a singular figure. He was apparently a man: in stature a Patagonian, and robust as a well-fed ogre. His countenance was jolly, but consequential; and his costume a curious mixture of a hunting-dress and a court suit. He was on foot, and in spite of the crowd, with the aid of a good whip and his left fist made his way with great ease. On inquiring who this extraordinary personage might be, Popanilla was informed that it was The Aboriginal Inhabitant. As the giant passed the Ambassador's carriages, the whole suite, even Lord Moustache, rose and bent low; and the Secretary told Popanilla that there was no person in the island for whom the Government of Vraïbleusia entertained so profound a respect.

The crowd was now so immense that even the progress of the Aboriginal Inhabitant was for a moment impeded. The great man got surrounded by a large body of little mechanics. The contrast between the pale perspiring visages and lean forms of these emaciated and half-degenerated creatures, and the jolly form and ruddy countenance, gigantic limbs and ample frame, of the Aboriginal, was most striking; nor could anyone view the group for an instant without feeling convinced that the latter was really a superior existence. The mechanics, who were worn by labour, not reduced by famine, far from being miserable, were impudent. They began rating the mighty one for the dearness of his corn. He received their attacks with mildness. He reminded them that the regulation by which they procured their bread was the aboriginal law of the island, under which they had all so greatly flourished. He explained to them that it was owing to this protecting principle that he and his ancestors, having nothing to do but to hunt and shoot, had so preserved their health that, unlike the rest of the human race, they had not degenerated from the original form and nature of man. He showed that it was owing to the vigour of mind and body consequent upon this fine health that Vraibleusia had become the wonder of the world, and that they themselves were so actively employed; and he inferred that they surely could not grudge him the income which he derived, since that income was, in fact, the foundation of their own profits. He then satisfactorily demonstrated to them that if by any circumstances he were to cease to exist, the whole island would immediately sink under the sea. Having thus condescended to hold a little parley with his fellow-subjects, though not fellow-creatures, he gave them all a good sound flogging, and departed amidst the enthusiastic cheering of those whom he had so briskly lashed.

By this time Popanilla had arrived at the Hall of Audience.

It was a vast and venerable pile.

His Excellency and suite quitted their carriages amidst the renewed acclamations of the mob. Proceeding through a number of courts and quadrangles, crowded with guards and officials, they stopped before a bronze gate of great height. Over it was written, in vast characters of living flame, this inscription:

TO
THE WISEST AND THE BEST,
THE RICHEST AND THE MIGHTIEST,
THE GLORY AND THE ADMIRATION,
THE DEFENCE AND THE CONSTERNATION.

On reading this mysterious inscription his Excellency experienced a sudden and awful shudder. Lord Moustache, however, who was more used to mysteries, taking up a silver trumpet, which was fixed to the portal by a crimson cord, gave a loud blast. The gates flew open with the sound of a whirlwind, and Popanilla found himself in what at first appeared an illimitable hall. It was crowded, but perfect order was preserved. The Ambassador was conducted with great pomp to the upper end of the apartment, where, after an hour's walk, his Excellency arrived. At the extremity of the hall was a colossal and metallic Statue of extraordinary appearance. It represented an armed monarch. The head and bust were of gold, and the curling hair was crowned with an imperial diadem; the body and arms were of silver, worked in the semblance of a complete suit of enamelled armour of the feudal ages; and the thighs and legs were of iron, which the artist had clothed in the bandaged hose of the old Saxons. The figure bore the appearance of great antiquity, but had evidently been often repaired and renovated since its first formation. The workmanship was clearly of different eras, and the reparations, either from ignorance or intention, had often been effected with little deference to the original design. Part of the shoulders had been supplied by the other, though less precious, metal, and the Roman and Imperial ornaments had unaccountably been succeeded by the less classic, though more picturesque, decorations of Gothic armour. On the other hand, a great portion of the chivalric and precious material of the body had been removed, and replaced by a style and substance resembling those of the lower limbs. In its right hand the Statue brandished a naked sword, and with its left leant upon a huge, though extremely rich and elaborately carved, crosier. It trampled upon a shivered lance and a broken chain.

"Your Excellency perceives," said the Secretary, pointing to the Statue, "that ours is a mixed Government."

Popanilla was informed that this extraordinary Statue enjoyed all the faculties of an intellectual being, with the additional advantage of some faculties which intellectual beings do not enjoy. It possessed not only the faculty of speech, but of speaking truth; not only the power of judgment, but of judging rightly; not only the habit of listening, but of listening attentively. Its antiquity was so remote that the most profound and acute antiquarians had failed in tracing back its origin. The Aboriginal Inhabitant, however, asserted that it was the work of one of his ancestors; and as his assertion was confirmed by all traditions, the allegation was received. Whatever might have been its origin, certain it was that it was now immortal, for it could never die; and to whomsoever it might have been originally indebted for its power, not less sure was it that it was now omnipotent, for it could do all things. Thus alleged and thus believed the Vraibleusians, marvellous and sublime people! who, with all the impotence of mortality, have created a Government which is both immortal and omnipotent!

Generally speaking, the Statue was held in great reverence and viewed with great admiration by the whole Vraibleusian people. There were a few persons, indeed, who asserted that the creation of such a Statue was by no means so mighty a business as it had been the fashion to suppose; and that it was more than probable that, with the advantages afforded by the scientific discoveries of modern times, they would succeed in making a more useful one. This, indeed, they offered to accomplish, provided the present Statue were preliminarily destroyed; but as they were well assured that this offer would never be accepted, it was generally treated by those who refused it as a braggadocio. There were many also who, though they in general greatly admired and respected the present Statue, affected to believe that, though the execution was wonderful, and the interior machinery indeed far beyond the powers of the present age, nevertheless the design was in many parts somewhat rude, and the figure altogether far from being well-proportioned. Some thought the head too big, some too small; some that the body was disproportionately little; others, on the contrary, that it was so much too large that it had the appearance of being dropsical; others maintained that the legs were too weak for the support of the whole, and that they should be rendered more important and prominent members of the figure; while, on the contrary, there were yet others who cried out that really these members were already so extravagantly huge, so coarse, and so ungenteel, that they quite marred the general effect of a beautiful piece of sculpture.

The same differences existed about the comparative excellence of the three metals and the portions of the body which they respectively formed. Some admired the gold, and maintained that if it were not for the head the Statue would be utterly useless; others preferred the silver, and would assert that the body, which contained all the machinery, must clearly be the most precious portion; while a third party triumphantly argued that the iron legs which supported both body and head must surely be the most valuable part, since without them the Statue must fall. The first party advised that in all future reparations gold only should be introduced; and the other parties, of course, recommended with equal zeal their own favourite metals. It is observable, however, that if, under these circumstances, the iron race chanced to fail in carrying their point, they invariably voted for gold in preference to silver. But the most contradictory opinions, perhaps, were those which were occasioned by the instruments with which the Statue was armed and supported. Some affected to be so frightened by the mere sight of the brandished sword, although it never moved, that they pretended it was dangerous to live even under the same sky with it; while others, treating very lightly the terrors of this warlike instrument, would observe that much more was really to be apprehended from the remarkable strength and thickness of the calm and peace-inspiring crosier; and that as long as the Government was supported by this huge pastoral staff nothing could prevail against it; that it could dare all things, and even stand without the help of its legs. All these various opinions at least proved that, although the present might not be the most miraculous Statue that could possibly be created, it was nevertheless quite impossible ever to form one which would please all parties.

The care of this wonderful Statue was entrusted to twelve "Managers," whose duty it was to wind up and regulate its complicated machinery, and who answered for its good management by their heads. It was their business to consult the oracle upon all occasions, and by its decisions to administer and regulate all the affairs of the State. They alone were permitted to hear its voice; for the Statue never spoke in public save on rare occasions, and its sentences were then really so extremely commonplace that, had it not been for the deep wisdom of its general conduct, the Vraibleusians would have been almost tempted to believe that they really might exist without the services of the capital member. The twelve Managers surrounded the Statue at a respectful distance; their posts were the most distinguished in the State; and indeed the duties attached to them were so numerous, so difficult, and so responsible, that it required no ordinary abilities to fulfil, and demanded no ordinary courage to aspire to, them.

The Fantaisian Ambassador, having been presented, took his place on the right hand of the Statue, next to the Aboriginal Inhabitant, and public business then commenced.

There came forward a messenger, who, knocking his nose three times with great reverence on the floor, a knock for each metal of the figure, thus spoke:

"O thou wisest and best! thou richest and mightiest! thou glory and admiration! thou defence and consternation! Lo! the King of the North is cutting all his subjects' heads off!"

This announcement produced a great sensation. The Marquess Moustache took snuff; the Private Secretary said he had long suspected that this would be the case; and the Aboriginal Inhabitant remarked to Popanilla that the corn in the North was of an exceedingly coarse grain. While they were making these observations the twelve Managers had assembled in deep consultation around the Statue, and in a few minutes the Oracle was prepared. The answer was very simple, but the exordium was sublime. It professed that the Vraibleusian nation was the saviour and champion of the world; that it was the first principle of its policy to maintain the cause of any people struggling for their rights as men; and it avowed itself to be the grand patron of civil and religious liberty in all quarters of the globe. Forty-seven battalions of infantry and eighteen regiments of cavalry, twenty-four sail of the line, seventy transports, and fifteen bomb ketches, were then ordered to leave Vraibleusia for the North in less than sixty minutes!

"What energy!" said Popanilla; "what decision! what rapidity of execution!"

"Ay!" said the Aboriginal, smacking his thigh; "let them say what they like about their proportions, and mixtures, and metals—abstract nonsense! No one can deny that our Government works well. But see! here comes another messenger!"

"O thou wisest and best! thou richest and mightiest! thou glory and admiration! thou defence and consternation! Lo! the people of the South have cut their king's head off!"

"Well! I suppose that is exactly what you all want," said the innocent Popanilla.

The Private Secretary looked mysterious, and said that he was not prepared to answer; that his department never having been connected with this species of business, he was unable at the moment to give his Excellency the requisite information. At the same time, he begged to state that, provided anything he said should not commit him, he had no objection to answer the question hypothetically. The Aboriginal Inhabitant said that he would have no hypotheses or Jacobins; that he did not approve of cutting off kings' heads; and that the Vraibleusians were the most monarchical people in the world. So saying, he walked up, without any ceremony, to the chief Manager, and taking him by the button, conversed with him some time in an earnest manner, which made the stocks fall two per cent.

The Statue ordered three divisions of the grand army and a battering-train of the first grade off to the South without the loss of a second. A palace and establishment were immediately directed to be prepared for the family of the murdered monarch, and the commander-in-chief was instructed to make every exertion to bring home the body of his Majesty embalmed. Such an immense issue of pink shells was occasioned by this last expedition that stocks not only recovered themselves, but rose considerably.

The excitement occasioned by this last announcement evaporated at the sight of a third messenger. He informed the Statue that the Emperor of the East was unfortunately unable to pay the interest upon his national debt; that his treasury was quite empty and his resources utterly exhausted. He requested the assistance of the most wealthy and the most generous of nations; and he offered them as security for their advances his gold and silver mines, which, for the breadth of their veins and the richness of their ores, he said, were unequalled. He added, that the only reason they were unworked was the exquisite flavour of the water-melons in his empire, which was so delicious that his subjects of all classes, passing their whole day in devouring them, could be induced neither by force nor persuasion to do anything else. The cause was so reasonable, and the security so satisfactory, that the Vraibleusian Government felt themselves authorised in shipping off immediately all the gold in the island. Pink shells abounded, and stocks were still higher.

"You have no mines in Vraibleusia, I believe?" said Popanilla to the Aboriginal.

"No! but we have taxes."

"Very true!" said Popanilla.

"I understand that a messenger has just arrived from the West," said the Secretary to the Fantaisian Plenipotentiary. "He must bring interesting intelligence from such interesting countries. Next to ourselves, they are evidently the most happy, the most wealthy, the most enlightened, and the most powerful Governments in the world. Although founded only last week, they already rank in the first class of nations. I will send you a little pamphlet to-morrow, which I have just published upon this subject, in which you will see that I have combated, I trust not unsuccessfully, the ridiculous opinions of those cautious statesmen who insinuate that the stability of these Governments is even yet questionable."

The messenger from the Republics of the West now prostrated himself before the Statue. He informed it that two parties had, unfortunately, broken out in these countries, and threatened their speedy dissolution; that one party maintained that all human government originated in the *wants* of man; while the other party asserted that it originated in the *desires* of man. That these factions had become so violent and so universal that public business was altogether stopped, trade quite extinct, and the instalments due to Vraibleusia not forthcoming. Finally, he entreated the wisest and the best of nations to send to these distracted lands some discreet and trusty personages, well instructed in the first principles of government, in order that they might draw up constitutions for the ignorant and irritated multitude.

The Private Secretary told Popanilla that this was no more than he had long expected; that all this would subside, and that he should publish a postscript to his pamphlet in a few days, which he begged to dedicate to him.

A whole corps diplomatique and another shipful of abstract philosophers, principally Scotchmen, were immediately ordered off to the West; and shortly after, to render their first principles still more effective and their administrative arrangements still more influential, some brigades of infantry and a detachment of the guards followed. Free constitutions are apt to be misunderstood until half of the nation are bayoneted and the rest imprisoned.

As this mighty Vraibleusian nation had, within the last half-hour, received intelligence from all quarters of the globe, and interfered in all possible affairs, civil and military, abstract, administrative, diplomatic, and financial, Popanilla supposed that the assembly would now break up. Some petty business, however, remained. War was declared against the King of Sneezeland, for presuming to buy pockethandkerchiefs of another nation; and the Emperor of Pastilles was threatened with a bombardment for daring to sell his peppers to another people. There were also some dozen commercial treaties to be signed, or canvassed, or cancelled; and a report having got about that there was a rumour that some disturbance had broken out in some parts unknown, a flying expedition was dispatched, with sealed orders, to circumnavigate the globe and arrange affairs. By this time Popanilla thoroughly understood the meaning of the mysterious inscription.

Just as the assembly was about to be dissolved another messenger, who, in his agitation, even forgot the accustomed etiquette of salutation, rushed into the presence.

"O most mighty! Sir Bombastes Furioso, who commanded our last expedition, having sailed, in the hurry, with wrong orders, has attacked our ancient ally by mistake, and utterly destroyed him!"

Here was a pretty business for the Best and Wisest! At first the Managers behaved in a manner the most undiplomatic, and quite lost their temper; they raved, they stormed, they contradicted each other, they contradicted themselves, and swore that Sir Bombastes' head should answer for it. Then they subsided into sulkiness, and at length, beginning to suspect that the fault might ultimately attach only to themselves, they got frightened, and held frequent consultations with pale visages and quivering lips. After some time they thought they could do nothing wiser than put a good face upon the affair; whatever might be the result, it was, at any rate, a victory, and a victory would please the vainest of nations: and so these blundering and blustering gentlemen determined to adopt the conqueror, whom they were at first weak enough to disclaim, then vile enough to bully, and finally forced to reward. The Statue accordingly whispered a most elaborate panegyric on Furioso, which was of course duly delivered. The Admiral, who was neither a coward nor a fool, was made ridiculous by being described as the greatest commander that ever existed; one whom nature, in a gracious freak, had made to shame us little men; a happy compound of the piety of Noah, the patriotism of Themistocles, the skill of Columbus, and the courage of Nelson; and his exploit styled the most glorious and unrivalled victory that was ever achieved, even by the Vraibleusians! Honours were decreed in profusion, a general illumination ordered for the next twenty nights, and an expedition immediately dispatched to attack the right man.

All this time the conquerors were in waiting in an ante-room, in great trepidation, and fully prepared to be cashiered or cut in quarters. They were rather surprised when, bowing to the ground, they were saluted by some half-dozen lords-in-waiting as the heroes of the age, congratulated upon their famous achievements, and humbly requested to appear in the Presence.

The warriors accordingly walked up in procession to the Statue, who, opening its mighty mouth, vomited forth a flood of ribbons, stars, and crosses, which were divided among the valiant band. This oral discharge the Vraibleusians called the "fountain of honour."

Scarcely had the mighty Furioso and his crew disappeared than a body of individuals arrived at the top of the hall, and, placing themselves opposite the Managers, began rating them for their inefficient administration of the island, and expatiated on the inconsistency of their late conduct to the conquering Bombastes. The Managers defended themselves in a manner perfectly in character with their recent behaviour; but their opponents were not easily satisfied with their confused explanations and their explained confusions, and the speeches on both sides grew warmer. At length the opposition proceeded to expel the administration from their places by force, and an eager scuffle between the two parties now commenced. The general body of spectators continued only to observe, and did not participate in the fray. At first, this *mêlée* only excited amusement; but as it lengthened some wisely observed that public business greatly suffered by these private squabbles; and some even ventured to imagine that the safety of the Statue might be implicated by their continuance. But this last fear was futile.

Popanilla asked the Private Secretary which party he thought would ultimately succeed. The Private Secretary said that, if the present Managers retained their places, he thought that they would not go out; but if, on the other hand, they were expelled by the present opposition, it was probable that the present opposition would become Managers. The Aboriginal thought both parties equally incompetent; and told Popanilla some long stories about a person who was chief Manager in his youth, about five hundred years ago, to whom he said he was indebted for all his political principles, which did not surprise Popanilla.

At this moment a noise was heard throughout the hall which made his Excellency believe that something untoward had again happened, and that another conqueror by mistake had again arrived. A most wonderful being galloped up to the top of the apartment. It was half man and half horse. The Secretary told Popanilla that this was the famous Centaur Chiron; that his Horseship, having wearied of his ardent locality in the constellations, had descended some years back to the island of Vraibleusia; that he had commanded the armies of the nation in all the great wars, and had gained every battle in which he had ever been engaged. Chiron was no less skilful, he said, in civil than in military affairs; but the Vraibleusians, being very jealous of allowing themselves to be governed by their warriors, the Centaur had lately been out of employ. While the Secretary was giving him this information Popanilla perceived that the great Chiron was attacking the combatants on both sides. The tutor of Achilles, Hercules, and Æneas, of course, soon succeeded in kicking them all out, and constituted himself chief and sole Manager of the Statue. Some grumbled at this autocratic conduct "upon principle," but they were chiefly connections of the expelled. The great majority, wearied with public squabbles occasioned by private ends, rejoiced to see the public interest entrusted to an individual who had a reputation to lose. Intelligence of the appointment of the Centaur was speedily diffused throughout the island, and produced great and general satisfaction. There were a few, indeed, impartial personages, who had no great taste for Centaurs in civil capacities, from an apprehension that, if he could not succeed in persuading them by his eloquence, his Grace might chance to use his heels.

CHAPTER XI

On the evening of his presentation day his Excellency the Fantaisian Ambassador and suite honoured the national theatre with their presence. Such a house was never known! The pit was miraculously overflown before the doors were opened, although the proprietor did not permit a single private entrance. The enthusiasm was universal, and only twelve persons were killed. The Private Secretary told Popanilla, with an air of great complacency, that the Vraibleusian theatres were the largest in the world. Popanilla had little doubt of the truth of this information, as a long time elapsed before he could even discover the stage. He observed that every person in the theatre carried a long black glass, which he kept perpetually fixed to his eye. To sit in a huge room hotter than a glass house, in a posture emulating the most sanctified

Faquir, with a throbbing headache, a breaking back, and twisted legs, with a heavy tube held over one eye, and the other covered with the unemployed hand, is in Vraibleusia called a public amusement.

The play was by the most famous dramatist that Vraibleusia ever produced; and certainly, when his Excellency witnessed the first scenes, it was easier to imagine that he was once more in his own sunset Isle of Fantaisie than in the railroad state of Vraibleusia: but, unfortunately, this evening the principal characters and scenes were omitted, to make room for a moving panorama, which lasted some hours, of the chief and most recent Vraibleusian victories. The audience fought their battles o'er again with great fervour. During the play one of the inferior actors was supposed to have saluted a female chorus-singer with an ardour which was more than theatrical, and every lady in the house immediately fainted; because, as the eternal Secretary told Popanilla, the Vraibleusians are the most modest and most moral nation in the world. The male part of the audience insisted, in indignant terms, that the offending performer should immediately be dismissed. In a few minutes he appeared upon the stage to make a most humble apology for an offence which he was not conscious of having committed; but the most moral and the most modest of nations was implacable, and the wretch was expelled. Having a large family dependent upon his exertions, the actor, according to a custom prevalent in Vraibleusia, went immediately and drowned himself in the nearest river. Then the ballet commenced.

It was soon discovered that the chief dancer, a celebrated foreigner, who had been announced for this evening, was absent. The uproar was tremendous, and it was whispered that the house would be pulled down; because, as Popanilla was informed, the Vraibleusians are the most particular and the freest people in the world, and never will permit themselves to be treated with disrespect. The principal chandelier having been destroyed, the manager appeared, and regretted that Signor Zephyrino, being engaged to dine with a Grandee of the first class, was unable to fulfil his engagement. The house became frantic, and the terrified manager sent immediately for the Signor. The artist, after a proper time had elapsed, appeared with a napkin round his neck and a fork in his hand, with which he stood some moments, until the uproar had subsided, picking his teeth. At length, when silence was obtained, he told them that he was surprised that the most polished and liberal nation in the world should behave themselves in such a brutal and narrow-minded manner. He threatened them that he would throw up his engagement immediately, and announce to all foreign parts that they were a horde of barbarians; then, abusing them for a few seconds in round terms, he retired, amidst the cheerings of the whole house, to finish his wine.

When the performances were finished the audience rose and joined in chorus. On Popanilla inquiring the name and nature of this effusion, he was told that it was the national air of the Isle of Fantaisie, sung in compliment to himself. His Excellency shrugged his shoulders and bowed low.

The next morning, attended by his suite, Popanilla visited the most considerable public offices and manufactories in Hubbabub. He was received in all places with the greatest distinction. He was invariably welcomed either by the chiefs of the department or the proprietors themselves, and a sumptuous collation was prepared for him in every place. His Excellency evinced the liveliest interest in everything that was pointed out to him, and instantaneously perceived that the Vraibleusians exceeded the rest of the world in manufactures and public works as much as they did in arms, morals, modesty, philosophy, and politics. The Private Secretary being absent upon his postscript, Popanilla received the most satisfactory information upon all subjects from the Marquess himself. Whenever he addressed any question to his Lordship, his noble attendant, with the greatest politeness, begged him to take some refreshment. Popanilla returned to his hotel with a great admiration of the manner in which refined philosophy in Vraibleusia was applied to the common purposes of life; and found that he had that morning acquired a general knowledge of the chief arts and sciences, eaten some hundred sandwiches, and tasted as many bottles of sherry.

CHAPTER XII

THE most commercial nation in the world was now busily preparing to diffuse the blessings of civilisation and competition throughout the native country of their newly-acquired friend. The greatest exporters that ever existed had never been acquainted with such a subject for exportation as the Isle of Fantaisie. There everything was wanted. It was not a partial demand which was to be satisfied, nor a particular deficiency which was to be supplied; but a vast population was thoroughly to be furnished with every article which a vast population must require. From the manufacturer of steam-engines to the manufacturer of stockings, all were alike employed. There was no branch of trade in Vraibleusia which did not equally rejoice at this new opening for commercial enterprise, and which was not equally interested in this new theatre for Vraibleusian industry, Vraibleusian invention, Vraibleusian activity, and, above all, Vraïbleusian competition.

Day and night the whole island was employed in preparing for the great fleet and in huzzaing Popanilla. When at home, every ten minutes he was obliged to appear in the balcony, and then, with hand on heart and hat in hand, ah! that bow! that perpetual motion of popularity! If a man love ease, let him be most unpopular. The Managers did the impossible to assist and advance the intercourse between the two nations. They behaved in a liberal and enlightened manner, and a deputation of liberal and enlightened merchants consequently waited upon them with a vote of thanks. They issued so many pink shells that the price of the public funds was doubled, and affairs arranged so skilfully that money was universally declared to be worth nothing, so that everyone in the island, from the Premier down to the mendicant whom the lecture-loving Skindeep threatened with the bastinado, was enabled to participate, in some degree, in the approaching venture, if we should use so dubious a term in speaking of profits so certain.

Compared with the Fantaisian connection, the whole commerce of the world appeared to the Vraibleusians a retail business. All other customers were neglected or discarded, and each individual seemed to concentrate his resources to supply the wants of a country where they dance by moonlight, live on fruit, and sleep on flowers. At length the first fleet of five hundred sail, laden with wonderful specimens of Vraibleusian mechanism, and innumerable bales of Vraibleusian manufactures; articles raw and refined, goods dry and damp, wholesale and retail; silks and woollen cloths; cottons, cutlery, and camlets; flannels and ladies' albums; under waistcoats, kid gloves, engravings, coats, cloaks, and ottomans; lamps and looking-glasses; sofas, round tables, equipages, and scent-bottles; fans and tissue-flowers; porcelain, poetry, novels, newspapers, and cookery books; bear's-grease, blue pills, and bijouterie; arms, beards, poodles, pages, moustachios, court-guides, and bonbons; music, pictures, ladies' maids, scrapbooks, buckles, boxing-gloves, guitars, and snuff-boxes; together with a company of opera-singers, a band of comedians, a popular preacher, some quacks, lecturers, artists, and literary gentlemen, principally sketch-book men, quitted, one day, with a favourable wind, and amid the exultation of the inhabitants, the port of Hubbabub!

When his Excellency Prince Popanilla heard of the contents of this stupendous cargo, notwithstanding his implicit confidence in the superior genius and useful knowledge of the Vraibleusians, he could not refrain from expressing a doubt whether, in the present undeveloped state of his native land, any returns could be made proportionate to so curious and elaborate an importation; but whenever he ventured to intimate his opinion to any of the most commercial nation in the world he was only listened to with an incredulous smile which seemed to pity his inexperience, or told, with an air of profound self-complacency, that in Fantaisie "there must be great resources."

In the meantime, public companies were formed for working the mines, colonising the waste lands, and cutting the coral rocks of the Indian Isle, of all which associations Popanilla was chosen Director by acclamation. These, however, it must be confessed, were speculations of a somewhat doubtful nature; but the Branch Bank Society of the Isle of Fantaisie really held out flattering prospects.

When the fleet had sailed they gave Popanilla a public dinner. It was attended by all the principal men in the island, and he made a speech, which was received in a rather different manner than was his sunset oration by the monarch whom he now represented. Fantaisie and its accomplished Envoy were at the same time the highest and the universal fashion. The ladies sang *à la Syrene*, dressed their hair *à la Mermede*, and themselves *à la Fantastique;* which, by the bye, was not new; and the gentlemen wore boa-constrictor cravats and waltzed *à la mer Indienne*—a title probably suggested by a remembrance of the dangers of the sea.

It was soon discovered that, without taking into consideration the average annual advantages which would necessarily spring from their new connection, the profits which must accrue upon the present expedition alone had already doubled the capital of the island. Everybody in Vraibleusia had either made a fortune, or laid the foundation of one. The penniless had become prosperous, and the principal merchants and manufacturers, having realised large capitals, retired from business. But the colossal fortunes were made by the gentlemen who had assisted the administration in raising the price of the public funds and in managing the issues of the pink shells. The effect of this immense increase of the national wealth and of this creation of new and powerful classes of society was speedily felt. Great moves to the westward were perpetual, and a variety of sumptuous squares and streets were immediately run up in that chosen land. Butlers were at a premium; coachmakers never slept; card-engravers, having exhausted copper, had recourse to steel; and the demand for arms at the Heralds' College was so great that even the mystical genius of Garter was exhausted, and hostile meetings were commenced between the junior members of some ancient families, to whom the same crest had been unwittingly apportioned; but, the seconds interfering, they discovered themselves to be relations. All the eldest sons were immediately to get into Parliament, and all the younger ones as quickly into the Guards; and the simple Fantaisian Envoy, who had the peculiar felicity of taking everything *au pied de la lettre*, made a calculation that, if these arrangements were duly effected, in a short time the Vraibleusian representatives would exceed the Vraibleusians represented; and that there would be at least three officers in the Vraibleusian Guards to every private. Judging from the beards and moustachios which now abounded, this great result was near at hand. With the snub nose which is the characteristic of the millionaires, these appendages produce a pleasing effect.

When the excitement had a little subsided; when their mighty mansions were magnificently furnished; when their bright equipages were fairly launched, and the due complement of their liveried retainers perfected; when, in short, they had imitated the aristocracy in every point in which wealth could rival blood; then the new people discovered with dismay that one thing was yet wanting, which treasure could not purchase, and which the wit of others could not supply—Manner. In homely phrase, the millionaires did not know how to behave themselves. Accustomed to the counting-house, the factory, or the exchange, they looked queer in saloons, and said "Sir!" when they addressed you; and seemed stiff, and hard, and hot. Then the solecisms they committed in more formal society, oh! they were outrageous; and a leading article in an eminent journal was actually written upon the subject. I dare not write the deeds they did; but it was whispered that when they drank wine they filled their glasses to the very brim. All this delighted the old class, who were as envious of their riches as the new people were emulous of their style.

In any other country except Vraibleusia persons so situated would have consoled themselves for their disagreeable position by a consciousness that their posterity would not be annoyed by the same deficiencies; but the wonderful Vraibleusian people resembled no other, even in their failings. They determined to acquire in a day that which had hitherto been deemed the gradual consequence of tedious education.

A "Society for the Diffusion of Fashionable Knowledge" was announced; the Millionaires looked triumphantly mysterious, the aristocrats quizzed. The object of the society is intimated by its title; and the method by which its institutors proposed to attain this object was the periodical publication of pamphlets, under the superintendence of a competent committee. The first treatise appeared: its subject was NONCHALANCE. It instructed its students ever to appear inattentive in the society of men, and heartless when they conversed with women. It taught them not to understand a man if he were witty; to misunderstand him if he were eloquent; to yawn or stare if he chanced to elevate his voice, or presumed to ruffle the placidity of the social calm by addressing his fellow-creatures with teeth unparted. Excellence was never to be recognised, but only disparaged with a look: an opinion or a sentiment, and the *nonchalant* was lost for ever. For these, he was to substitute a smile like a damp sunbeam, a moderate curl of the upper lip, and the all-speaking and perpetual shrug of the shoulders. By a skilful management of these qualities it was shown to be easy to ruin another's reputation and ensure your own without ever opening your mouth. To woman, this exquisite treatise said much in a few words: "Listlessness, listlessness, listlessness," was the edict by which the most beautiful works of nature were to be regulated, who are only truly charming when they make us feel and feel themselves: "Listlessness, listlessness, listlessness"; for when you choose not to be listless, the contrast is so striking that the triumph must be complete.

The treatise said much more, which I shall omit. It forgot, however, to remark that this vaunted nonchalance may be the offspring of the most contemptible and the most odious of passions; and that while it may be exceedingly refined to appear uninterested when others are interested, to witness excellence without emotion, and to listen to genius without animation, the heart of the Insensible may as often be inflamed by Envy as inspired by Fashion.

Dissertations "On leaving cards," "On cutting intimate friends," "On cravats," "On dinner courses," "On poor relations," "On bores," "On lions," were announced as speedily to appear. In the meantime, the Essay on Nonchalance produced the best effects. A *ci-devant* stock-broker cut a Duke dead at his club the day after its publication; and his daughter yawned while his Grace's eldest son, the Marquess, made her an offer as she was singing "Di tanti palpiti." The aristocrats got a little frightened, and when an eminent hop-merchant and his lady had asked a dozen Countesses to dinner, and forgot to be at home to receive them, the old class left off quizzing.

The pamphlets, however, continued issuing forth, and the new people advanced at a rate which was awful. They actually began to originate some ideas of their own, and there was a whisper among the leaders of voting the aristocrats old-fashioned. The Diffusion Society now caused these exalted personages great anxiety and uneasiness. They argued that Fashion was a relative quality; that it was quite impossible, and not to be expected, that all people were to aspire to be fashionable; that it was not in the nature of things, and that, if it were, society could not exist; that the more their imitators advanced the more they should baffle their imitations; that a first and fashionable class was a necessary consequence of the organisation of man; and that a line of demarcation would for ever be drawn between them and the other islanders. The warmth and eagerness with which they maintained and promulgated their opinions might have tempted, however, an impartial person to suspect that they secretly entertained some doubts of their truth and soundness.

On the other hand, the other party maintained that Fashion was a positive quality; that the moment a person obtained a certain degree of refinement he or she became, in fact and essentially, fashionable; that the views of the old class were unphilosophical and illiberal, and unworthy of an enlightened age; that men are equal, and that everything is open to everybody; and that when we take into consideration the nature of man, the origin of society, and a few other things, and duly consider the constant inclination and progression towards perfection which mankind evince, there was no reason why, in the course of time, the whole nation should not go to Almack's on the same night.

At this moment of doubt and dispute the Government of Vraibleusia, with that spirit of conciliation and liberality and that perfect wisdom for which it had been long celebrated, caring very little for the old class, whose interest, it well knew, was to support it, and being exceedingly desirous of engaging the affections of the new race, declared in their favour; and acting upon that sublime scale of measures for which this great nation has always been so famous, the Statue issued an edict that a new literature should be invented, in order at once to complete the education of the Millionaires and the triumph of the Romantic over the Classic School of Manners.

The most eminent writers were, as usual, in the pay of the Government, and BURLINGTON, A TALE OF FASHIONABLE LIFE, in three volumes, post octavo, was sent forth. Two or three similar works, bearing titles equally euphonious and aristocratic, were published daily; and so exquisite was the style of these productions, so naturally artificial the construction of their plots, and so admirably inventive the conception of their characters, that many who had been repulsed by the somewhat abstract matter and arid style of the treatises, seduced by the interest of a story, and by the dazzling delicacies of a charming style, really now picked up a considerable quantity of very useful knowledge; so that when the delighted students had eaten some fifty or sixty imaginary dinners in my lord's dining-room, and whirled some fifty or sixty imaginary waltzes in my lady's dancing-room, there was scarcely a brute left among the whole millionaires. But what produced the most beneficial effects on the new people, and excited the greatest indignation and despair among the old class, were some volumes which the Government, with shocking Machiavellism, bribed some needy scions of nobility to scribble, and which revealed certain secrets vainly believed to be quite sacred and inviolable.

CHAPTER XIII

SHORTLY after the sailing of the great fleet the Private Secretary engaged in a speculation which was rather more successful than any one contained in his pamphlet on "The Present State of the Western Republics."

One morning, as he and Popanilla were walking on a quay, and deliberating on the clauses of the projected commercial treaty between Vraibleusia and Fantaisie, the Secretary suddenly stopped, as if he had seen his father's ghost or lost the thread of his argument, and asked Popanilla, with an air of suppressed agitation, whether he observed anything in the distance. Popanilla, who, like all savages, was long-sighted, applying to his eye the glass which, in conformity to the custom of the country, he always wore round his neck, confessed that he saw nothing. The Secretary, who had never unfixed his glass nor moved a step since he asked the question, at length, by pointing with his finger, attracted Popanilla's attention to what his Excellency conceived to be a porpoise bobbing up and down in the waves. The Secretary, however, was not of the same opinion as the Ambassador. He was not very communicative, indeed, as to his own opinion upon this grave subject, but he talked of making farther observations when the tide went down; and was so listless, abstracted, and absent, during the rest of their conversation, that it soon ceased, and they speedily parted.

The next day, when Popanilla read the morning papers, a feat which he regularly performed, for spelling the newspaper was quite delicious to one who had so recently learned to read, he found that they spoke of nothing but of the discovery of a new island, information of which had been received by the Government only the preceding night. The Fantaisian Ambassador turned quite pale, and for the first time in his life experienced the passion of jealousy, the green-eyed monster, so called from only being experienced by green-horns. Already the prominent state he represented seemed to retire to the background. He did not doubt that the Vraibleusians were the most capricious as well as the most commercial nation in the world. His reign was evidently over. The new island would send forth a Prince still more popular. His allowance of pink shells would be gradually reduced, and finally withdrawn. His doubts, also, as to the success of the recent expedition to Fantaisie began to revive. His rising reminiscences of his native land, which, with the joint assistance of popularity and philosophy, he had hitherto succeeded in stifling, were indeed awkward. He could not conceive his mistress with a page and a poodle. He feared much that the cargo was not well assorted. Popanilla determined to inquire after his canoe.

His courage, however, was greatly reassured when, on reading the second edition, he learned that the new island was not of considerable size, though most eligibly situate; and, moreover, that it was perfectly void of inhabitants. When the third edition was published he found, to his surprise, that the Private Secretary was the discoverer of this opposition island. This puzzled the Plenipotentiary greatly. He read on; he found that this acquisition, upon which all Vraibleusia was congratulated in such glowing terms by all its journals, actually produced nothing. His Excellency began to breathe; another paragraph, and he found that the rival island was, a rock! He remembered the porpoise of yesterday. The island certainly could not be very large, even at low water. Popanilla once more felt like a Prince: he defied all the discoverers that could ever exist. He thought of the great resources of the great country he represented with proud satisfaction. He waited with easy confidence the return of the fleet which had carried out the most judicious assortment with which he had ever been acquainted to the readiest market of which he had any knowledge. He had no doubt his mistress would look most charmingly in a *barége*. Popanilla determined to present his canoe to the National Museum.

Although his Excellency had existed in the highest state of astonishment during his whole mission to Vraibleusia, it must be confessed, now that he understood his companion's question of yesterday, he particularly stared. His wonder was not decreased in the evening, when the *Government Gazette* appeared. It contained an order for the immediate fortification of the new island by the most skilful engineers, without estimates. A strong garrison was instantly embarked. A Governor and a Deputy-Governor, and Storekeepers, more plentiful than stores, were to accompany them. The Private Secretary went out as President of Council. A Bishop was promised; and a complete Court of Judicature, Chancery, King's Bench, Common Pleas, and Exchequer, were to be off the next week. It is only due to the characters of courtiers, who are so often reproached with ingratitude to their patrons, to record that the Private Secretary, in the most delicate manner, placed at the disposal of his former employer, the Marquess Moustache, the important office of Agent for the Indemnity Claims of the original Inhabitants of the Island; the post being a sinecure, the income being considerable, and local attendance being unnecessary, the noble Lord, in a manner equally delicate, appointed himself.

"Upon what system," one day inquired that unwearied political student, the Fantaisian Ambassador, of his old friend Skindeep, "does your Government surround a small rock in the middle of the sea with fortifications, and cram it full of clerks, soldiers, lawyers, and priests?"

"Why, really, your Excellency, I am the last man in the world to answer questions; but I believe we call it THE COLONIAL SYSTEM!"

Before the President, and Governor, and Deputy-Governor, and Storekeepers had embarked, the Vraibleusian journals, who thought that the public had been satiated with congratulations on the Colonial System, detected that the present colony was a job. Their reasoning was so convincing, and their denunciations so impressive, that the Managers got frightened, and cut off one of the Deputy-Storekeepers. The President of Council now got more frightened than the Managers. He was one of those men who think that the world can be saved by writing a pamphlet. A pamphlet accordingly appeared upon the subject of the new colony. The writer showed that the debateable land was the most valuable acquisition ever attained by a nation famous for their acquisitions; that there was a spring of water in the middle of the rock of a remarkable freshness, and which was never dry except during the summer and the earlier winter months; that all their outward-bound ships would experience infinite benefit from this fresh water; that the scurvy would therefore disappear from the service; and that the naval victories which the Vraibleusians would gain in future wars would consequently be occasioned by the present colony. No one could mistake the felicitous reasoning of the author of "The Present State of the Western Republics!"

About this time Popanilla fell ill. He lost his appetite and his spirits, and his digestion was sadly disordered. His friends endeavoured to console him by telling him that dyspepsia was the national disease of Vraibleusia; that its connection with civil and religious liberty was indissoluble; that every man, woman, and child above fifteen in the island was a martyr to it; that it was occasioned by their rapid mode of dispatching their meals, which again was occasioned by the little time which the most active nation in the world could afford to bestow upon such a losing business as eating.

All this was no consolation to a man who had lost his appetite; and so Popanilla sent for a gentleman who, he was told, was the most eminent physician in the island. The most eminent physician, when he arrived, would not listen to a single syllable that his patient wished to address to him. He told Popanilla that his disorder was "decidedly liver"; that it was occasioned by his eating his meat before his bread instead of after it, and drinking at the end of the first course instead of the beginning of the second; that he had only to correct these ruinous habits, and that he would then regain his tone.

Popanilla observed the instructions of the eminent physician to the very letter. He invariably ate his bread before his meat, and watched the placing of the first dish of the second course upon the table ere he ventured to refresh himself with any liquid. At the end of a week he was infinitely worse.

He now called in a gentleman who was recommended to him as the most celebrated practitioner in all Vraibleusia. The most celebrated practitioner listened with great attention to every particular that his patient had to state, but never condescended to open his own mouth. Popanilla was delighted, and revenged himself for the irritability of the eminent physician. After two more visits, the most celebrated practitioner told Popanilla that his disorder was "unquestionably nervous"; that he had over-excited himself by talking too much; that in future he must count five between each word he uttered, never ask any questions, and avoid society; that is, never stay at an evening party on any consideration later than twenty-two minutes past two, and never be induced by any persuasion to dine out more than once on the same day. The most celebrated practitioner added that he had only to observe these regulations, and that he would speedily recover his energy.

Popanilla never asked a question for a whole week, and Skindeep never knew him more delightful. He not only counted five, but ten, between every word he uttered; and determining that his cure should not be delayed, whenever he had nobody to speak to he continued counting. In a few days this solitary computation brought on a slow fever.

He now determined to have a consultation between the most eminent physician and the most celebrated practitioner. It was delightful to witness the meeting of these great men. Not a shade of jealousy dimmed the sunshine of their countenances. After a consultation, they agreed that Popanilla's disorder was neither "liver," nor "nervous," but "mind": that he had done too much; that he had overworked his brain; that he must take more exercise; that he must breathe more air; that he must have relaxation; that he must have change of scene.

"Where shall I go?" was the first question which Popanilla had sent forth for a fortnight, and it was addressed to Skindeep.

"Really, your Excellency, I am the last man in the world to answer questions; but the place which is generally frequented by us when we are suffering from your complaint is Blunderland."

"Well, then, to Blunderland let us go!"

Shortly before Popanilla's illness he had been elected a member of the Vraibleusian Horticultural Society, and one evening he had endeavoured to amuse himself by reading the following CHAPTER ON FRUIT.

CHAPTER XIV

THAT a taste for fruit is inherent in man is an opinion which is sanctioned by the conduct of man in all ages and in all countries. While some nations have considered it profanation or pollution to nourish themselves with flesh or solace themselves with fish, while almost every member of the animal creation has in turn been considered either sacred or unclean, mankind, in all climes and in all countries, the Hindoo and the Hebrew, the Egyptian and the Greek, the Roman and the Frank, have, in some degree, made good their boastful claim to reason, by universally feeding upon those delightful productions of Nature which are nourished with the dews of heaven, and which live for ever in its breath.

And, indeed, when we consider how exceedingly refreshing at all times is the flavour of fruit; how very natural, and, in a manner, born in him, is man's inclination for it; how little it is calculated to pall upon his senses; and how conducive, when not eaten to excess, it is to his health, as well as to his pleasure; we must not be surprised that a conviction of its excellence should have been one of those few subjects on which men have never disagreed.

That some countries are more favoured in their fruit than others is a fact so notorious that its notice is unnecessary; but we are not therefore to suppose that their appetite for it is more keen than the appetite of other nations for their fruit who live in less genial climes. Indeed, if we were not led to believe that all nations are inspired by an equal love for this production, it might occasionally be suspected that some of those nations who are least skilful as horticulturalists evince a greater passion for their inferior growths than more fortunate people for their choicer produce. The effects of bad fruit, however, upon the constitution, and consequently upon the national character, are so injurious that every liberal man must regret that any people, either from ignorance or obligation, should be forced to have recourse to anything so fatal, and must feel that it is the duty of every one who professes to be a philanthropist to propagate and encourage a taste for good fruit throughout all countries of the globe.

A vast number of centuries before Popanilla had the fortune to lose his mistress's lock of hair, and consequently to become an ambassador to Vraibleusia, the inhabitants of that island, then scarcely more civilised than their new allies of Fantaisie were at present, suffered very considerably from the trash which they devoured, from that innate taste for fruit already noticed. In fact, although there are antiquaries who pretend that the Vraibleusians possessed some of the species of wild plums and apples even at that early period, the majority of inquirers are disposed to believe that their desserts were solely confined to the wildest berries, horse-chestnuts, and acorns.

A tradition runs, that while they were committing these abominations a ship, one of the first ships that had ever touched at the island, arrived at the present port of Hubbabub, then a spacious and shipless bay. The master of the vessel, on being brought before the King (for the story I am recording happened long before the construction of the miraculous Statue), presented, with his right hand, to his Majesty, a small pyramidal substance of a golden hue, which seemed to spring out of green and purple leaves. His Majesty did not exactly understand the intention of this ceremony; but of course, like a true legitimate, construed it into a symbol of homage. No sooner had the King brought the unknown substance near to his eyes, with the intention of scrutinising its nature, than the fragrance was so delightful that by mistake he applied it to his mouth. The King only took one mouthful, and then, with a cry of rapture, instantly handed the delicacy to his favourite, who, to the great mortification of the Secretary of State, finished it. The stranger, however, immediately supplied the surrounding courtiers from a basket, which was slung on his left arm; and no sooner had they all tasted his gift than they fell upon their knees to worship him, vowing that the distributor of such delight must be more than man. If this avowal be considered absurd and extraordinary in this present age of philosophy, we must not forget to make due allowance for the palates of individuals who, having been so long accustomed merely to horse-chestnuts and acorns, suddenly, for the first time in their lives, tasted pine-apple.

The stranger, with an air of great humility, disclaimed their proffered adoration, and told them that, far from being superior to common mortals, he was, on the contrary, one of the lowliest of the human race; in fact, he did not wish to conceal it; in spite of his vessel and his attendants, he was merely a market-gardener on a great scale. This beautiful fruit he had recently discovered in the East, to which quarter of the world he annually travelled in order to obtain a sufficient quantity to supply the great Western hemisphere, of which he himself was a native. Accident had driven him, with one of his ships, into the Island of Vraibleusia; and, as the islanders appeared to be pleased with his cargo, he said that he should have great pleasure in supplying them at present and receiving their orders for the future.

The proposition was greeted with enthusiasm. The King immediately entered into a contract with the market-gardener on his own terms. The sale, or cultivation, or even the eating of all other fruits was declared high-treason, and pine-apple, for weighty reasons duly recited in the royal proclamation, announced as the established fruit of the realm. The cargo, under the superintendence of some of the most trusty of the crew, was unshipped for the immediate supply of the island; and the merchant and his customers parted, mutually delighted and mutually profited.

Time flew on. The civilisation of Vraibleusia was progressive, as civilisation always is; and the taste for pine-apples ever on the increase, as the taste for pine-apples ever should be. The supply was regular and excellent, the prices reasonable, and the tradesmen civil. They, of course, had not failed to advance in fair proportion with the national prosperity. Their numbers had much increased as well as their customers. Fresh agents arrived with every fresh cargo. They had long quitted the stalls with which they had been contented on their first settlement in the island, and now were the dapper owners of neat depots in all parts of the kingdom where depots could find customers.

A few more centuries, and affairs began to change. All that I have related as matter of fact, and which certainly is not better authenticated than many other things that happened two or three thousand years ago, which, however, the most sceptical will not presume to maintain did not take place, was treated as the most idle and ridiculous fable by the dealers in pine-apples themselves. They said that they knew nothing about a market-gardener; that they were, and had always been, the subjects of the greatest Prince in the world, compared with whom all other crowned heads ranked merely as subjects did with their immediate sovereigns. This Prince, they said, lived in the most delicious region in the world, and the fruit which they imported could only be procured from his private gardens, where it sprang from one of the trees that had bloomed in the gardens of the Hesperides. The Vraibleusians were at first a little surprised at this information, but the old tradition of the market-gardener was certainly an improbable one; and the excellence of the fruit and the importance assumed by those who supplied it were deemed exceedingly good evidence of the truth of the present story. When the dealers had repeated their new tale for a certain number of years, there was not an individual in the island who in the slightest degree suspected its veracity. One more century, and no person had ever heard that any suspicions had ever existed.

The immediate agents of the Prince of the World could, of course, be no common personages; and the servants of the gardener, who some centuries before had meekly disclaimed the proffered reverence of his delighted customers, now insisted upon constant adoration from every eater of pine-apples in the island. In spite, however, of the arrogance of the dealers, of their refusal to be responsible to the laws of the country in which they lived, and of the universal precedence which, on all occasions, was claimed even by the shop-boys, so decided was the taste which the Vraibleusians had acquired for pine-apples that there is little doubt that, had the dealers in this delicious fruit been contented with the respect and influence and profit which were the consequences of their vocation, the Vraibleusians would never have presumed to have grumbled at their arrogance or to have questioned their privileges. But the agents, wearied of the limited sphere to which their exertions were confined, and encouraged by the success which every new claim and pretence on their part invariably experienced, began to evince an inclination to interfere in other affairs besides those of fruit, and even expressed their willingness to undertake no less an office than the management of the Statue.

A century or two were solely occupied by conflicts occasioned by the unreasonable ambition of these dealers in pine-apples. Such great political effects could be produced by men apparently so unconnected with politics as market-gardeners! Ever supported by the lower ranks, whom they supplied with fruit of the most exquisite flavour without charge, they were, for a long time, often the successful opponents, always the formidable adversaries, of the Vraibleusian aristocracy, who were the objects of their envy and the victims of their rapaciousness. The Government at last, by a vigorous effort, triumphed. In spite of the wishes of the majority of the nation, the whole of the dealers were one day expelled the island, and the Managers of the Statue immediately took possession of their establishments.

By distributing the stock of fruit which was on hand liberally, the Government, for a short time, reconciled the people to the change; but as their warehouses became daily less furnished they were daily reminded that, unless some system were soon adopted, the islanders must be deprived of a luxury to which they had been so long accustomed that its indulgence had, in fact, become a second nature. No one of the managers had the hardihood to propose a recurrence to horse-chestnuts. Pride and fear alike forbade a return to their old purveyor. Other fruits there were which, in spite of the contract with the market-gardener, had at various times been secretly introduced into the island; but they had never greatly flourished, and the Statue was loth to recommend to the notice of his subjects productions an indulgence in which, through the instigation of the recently expelled agents, it had so often denounced as detrimental to the health, and had so often discouraged by the severest punishments.

At this difficult and delicate crisis, when even expedients seemed exhausted, and statesmen were at fault, the genius of an individual offered a substitute. An inventive mind discovered the power of propagating suckers. The expelled dealers had either been ignorant of this power, or had concealed their knowledge of it. They ever maintained that it was impossible for pine-apples to grow except in one spot, and that the whole earth must be supplied from the gardens of the palace of the Prince of the World. Now, the Vraibleusians were flattered with the patriotic fancy of eating pine-apples of a home growth; and the blessed fortune of that nation, which did not depend for their supply of fruit upon a foreign country, was eagerly expatiated on. Secure from extortion and independent of caprice, the Vraibleusians were no longer to be insulted by the presence of foreigners; who, while they violated their laws with impunity, referred the Vraibleusians, when injured and complaining, to a foreign master.

No doubt this appeal to the patriotism, and the common sense, and the vanity of the nation would have been successful had not the produce of the suckers been both inferior in size and deficient in flavour. The Vraibleusians tasted and shook their heads. The supply, too, was as imperfect as the article; for the Government gardeners were but sorry horticulturists, and were ever making experiments and alterations in their modes of culture. The article was scarce, though the law had decreed it universal; and the Vraibleusians were obliged to feed upon fruit which they considered at the same time both poor and expensive. They protested as strongly against the present system as its promulgators had protested against the former one, and they revenged themselves for their grievances by breaking the shop-windows.

As any result was preferable, in the view of the Statue, to the re-introduction of foreign fruit and foreign agents, and as the Managers considered it highly important that an indissoluble connection should in future exist between the Government and so influential and profitable a branch of trade, they determined to adopt the most vigorous measures to infuse a taste for suckers in the discontented populace. But the eating of fruit being clearly a matter of taste, it is evidently a habit which should rather be encouraged by a plentiful supply of exquisite produce than enforced by the introduction of burning and bayonets. The consequences of the strong measures of the Government were universal discontent and partial rebellion. The islanders, foolishly ascribing the miseries which they endured, not so much to the folly of the Government as to the particular fruit through which the dissensions had originated, began to entertain a disgust for pine-apples altogether, and to sicken at the very mention of that production which had once occasioned them so much pleasure, and which had once commanded such decided admiration. They universally agreed that there were many other fruits in the world besides pine-apple which had been too long neglected. One dilated on the rich flavour of Melon; another panegyrised Pumpkin, and offered to make up by quantity for any slight deficiency in *gôut;* Cherries were not without their advocates; Strawberries were not forgotten. One maintained that the Fig had been pointed out as the established fruit of all countries; while another asked with a reeling eye, whether they need go far to seek when a God had condescended to preside over the Grape! In short, there was not a fruit which flourishes that did not find its votaries. Strange to say, another foreign product, imported from a neighbouring country famous for its barrenness, counted the most; and the fruit faction which chiefly frightened the Vraibleusian Government was an acid set, who crammed themselves with Crab-apples.

It was this party which first seriously and practically conceived the idea of utterly abolishing the ancient custom of eating pine-apples. While they themselves professed to devour no other fruit save crabs, they at the same time preached the doctrine of an universal fruit toleration, which they showed would be the necessary and natural consequence of the destruction of the old monopoly. Influenced by these representations, the great body of the people openly joined the Crab-apple men in their open attacks. The minority, who still retained a taste for pines, did not yield without an arduous though ineffectual struggle. During the riots occasioned by this rebellion the Hall of Audience was broken open, and the miraculous Statue, which was reputed to have a great passion for pine-apples, dashed to the ground. The Managers were either slain or disappeared. The whole affairs of the kingdom were conducted by a body called "the Fruit Committee"; and thus a total revolution of the Government of Vraibleusia was occasioned by the prohibition of foreign pine-apples. What an argument in favour of free trade!

Every fruit, except that one which had so recently been supported by the influence of authority and the terrors of law, might now be seen and devoured in the streets of Hubbabub. In one corner men were sucking oranges, as if they had lived their whole lives in salt: in another, stuffing pumpkin, like cannibals at their first child. Here one took in at a mouthful a bunch of grapes from which might have been pressed a good quart. Another was lying on the ground from a surfeit of mulberries. The effect of this irrational excess will be conceived by the judicious reader. Calcutta itself never suffered from a cholera morbus half so fearful. Thousands were dying. Were I Thucydides or Boccaccio, I would write pages on this plague. The commonwealth itself must soon have yielded its ghost, for all order had ceased throughout the island ever since they had deserted pine-apples. There was no Government: anarchy alone was perfect. Of the Fruit Committee, many of the members were dead or dying, and the rest were robbing orchards.

At this moment of disorganisation and dismay a stout soldier, one of the crab-apple faction, who had possessed sufficient command over himself, in spite of the seeming voracity of his appetite, not to indulge to a dangerous excess, made his way one morning into the old Hall of Audience, and there, groping about, succeeded in finding the golden head of the Statue; which placing on the hilt of his sword, the point of which he had stuck in the pedestal, he announced to the city that he had discovered the secret of conversing with this wonderful piece of mechanism, and that in future he would take care of the health and fortune of the State.

There were some who thought it rather strange that the head-piece should possess the power of resuming its old functions, although deprived of the aid of the body which contained the greater portion of the machinery. As it was evidently well supported by the sword, they were not surprised that it should stand without the use of its legs. But the stout soldier was the only one in the island who enjoyed the blessing of health. He was fresh, vigorous, and vigilant; they, exhausted, weak, and careless of everything except cure. He soon took measures for the prevention of future mischief and for the cure of the present; and when his fellow-islanders had recovered, some were grateful, others fearful, and all obedient.

So long as the stout soldier lived no dissensions on the subject of fruit ever broke out. Although he himself never interfered in the sale of the article, and never attempted to create another monopoly, still, by his influence and authority, he prevented any excess being occasioned by the fruit toleration which was enjoyed. Indeed, the Vraibleusians themselves had suffered so severely from their late indiscretions that such excesses were not likely again to occur. People began to discover that it was not quite so easy a thing as they had imagined for every man to be his own fruiterer; and that gardening was a craft which, like others, required great study, long practice, and early experience. Unable to supply themselves, the majority became the victims of quack traders. They sickened of spongy apricots, and foxy pears, and withered plums, and blighted apples, and tasteless berries. They at length suspected that a nation might fare better if its race of fruiterers were overseen and supported by the State, if their skill and their market were alike secured. Although, no longer being tempted to suffer from a surfeit, the health of the islanders had consequently recovered, this was, after all, but a negative blessing, and they sadly missed a luxury once so reasonable and so refreshing. They sighed for an established fruit and a protected race of cultivators. But the stout soldier was so sworn an enemy to any Government fruit, and so decided an admirer of the least delightful, that the people, having no desire of being forced to eat crab-apples, only longed for more delicious food in silence.

At length the stout soldier died, and on the night of his death the sword which had so long supported the pretended Government snapped in twain. No arrangement existed for carrying on the administration of affairs. The master-mind was gone, without having imparted the secret of conversing with the golden head to any successor. The people assembled in agitated crowds. Each knew his neighbour's thoughts without their being declared. All smacked their lips, and a cry for pine-apples rent the skies.

At this moment the Aboriginal Inhabitant appeared, and announced that in examining the old Hall of Audience, which had been long locked up, he had discovered in a corner, where they had been flung by the stout soldier when he stole away the head, the remaining portions of the Statue; that they were quite uninjured, and that on fixing the head once more upon them, and winding up the works, he was delighted to find that this great work of his ancestor, under whose superintendence the nation had so flourished, resumed all its ancient functions. The people were in a state of mind for a miracle, and they hailed the joyful wonder with shouts of triumph. The Statue was placed under the provisional care of the Aboriginal. All arrangements for its superintendence were left to his discretion, and its advice was instantly to be taken upon that subject which at present was nearest the people's hearts.

But that subject was encompassed with difficulties. Pine-apples could only be again produced by an application to the Prince of the World, whose connection they had rejected, and by an introduction into the island of those foreign agents, who, now convinced that the Vraibleusians could not exist without their presence, would be more arrogant and ambitious and turbulent than ever. Indeed, the Aboriginal feared that the management of the Statue would be the *sine qua non* of negotiation with the Prince. If this were granted, it was clear that Vraibleusia must in future only rank as a dependent state of a foreign power, since the direction of the whole island would actually be at the will of the supplier of pine-apples. Ah! this mysterious taste for fruit! In politics it has often occasioned infinite embarrassment.

At this critical moment the Aboriginal received information that, although the eating of pine-apples had been utterly abolished, and although it was generally supposed that a specimen of this fruit had long ceased to exist in the country, nevertheless a body of persons, chiefly consisting of the descendants of the Government gardeners who had succeeded the foreign agents, and who had never lost their taste for this pre-eminent fruit, had long been in the habit of secretly raising, for their private eating, pine-apples from the produce of those suckers which had originally excited such odium and occasioned such misfortunes. Long practice, they said, and infinite study, had so perfected them in this art that they now succeeded in producing pine-apples which, both for size and flavour, were not inferior to the boasted produce of a foreign clime. Their specimens verified their assertion, and the whole nation were invited to an instant trial. The long interval which had elapsed since any man had enjoyed a treat so agreeable, lent, perhaps, an additional flavour to that which was really excellent; and so enraptured and enthusiastic were the great majority of the people that the propagators of suckers would have had no difficulty, had they pushed the point, in procuring as favourable and exclusive a contract as the market-gardener of ancient days.

But the Aboriginal and his advisers were wisely mindful that the passions of a people are not arguments for legislation; and they felt conscious that when the first enthusiasm had subsided, and when their appetites were somewhat satisfied, the discontented voices of many who had been long used to other fruits would be recognised even amidst the shouts of the majority. They therefore greatly qualified the contract between the nation and the present fruiterers. An universal Toleration of Fruit was allowed; but no man was to take office under Government, or enter the services, or in any way become connected with the Court, who was not supplied from the Government depots.

Since this happy restoration pine-apple has remained the established fruit of the Island of Vraibleusia; and, it must be confessed, has been found wonderfully conducive to the health and happiness of the islanders. Some sectarians still remain obstinate, or tasteless enough to prefer pumpkin, or gorge the most acid apples, or chew the commonest pears; but they form a slight minority, which will gradually altogether disappear. The votaries of pine-apple pretend to observe the characteristic effect which such food produces upon the feeders. They denounce them as stupid, sour, and vulgar.

But while, notwithstanding an universal toleration, such an unanimity of taste apparently prevails throughout the island, as if fruit were a subject of such peculiar nicety that difference of opinion must necessarily rise among men, great fruit factions even now prevail in Vraibleusia; and, what is more extraordinary, prevail even among the admirers of pine-apples themselves. Of these, the most important is a sect which professes to discover a natural deficiency not only in all other fruits, but even in the finest pine-apples. Fruit, they maintain, should never be eaten in the state in which nature yields it to man; and they consequently are indefatigable in prevailing upon the less discriminating part of mankind to heighten the flavour of their pine-apples with ginger, or even with pepper. Although they profess to adopt these stimulants from the great admiration which they entertain for a high flavour, there are, nevertheless, some less ardent people who suspect that they rather have recourse to them from the weakness of their digestion.

CHAPTER XV

As his Excellency Prince Popanilla really could not think of being annoyed by the attentions of the mob during his visit to Blunderland, he travelled quite in a quiet way, under the name of the Chevalier de Fantaisie, and was accompanied only by Skindeep and two attendants. As Blunderland was one of the islands of the Vraibleusian Archipelago, they arrived there after the sail of a few hours.

The country was so beautiful that the Chevalier was almost reminded of Fantaisie. Green meadows and flourishing trees made him remember the railroads and canals of Vraibleusia without regret, or with disgust, which is much the same. The women were angelic, which is the highest praise; and the men the most light-hearted, merry, obliging, entertaining fellows that he had met with in the whole course of his life. Oh! it was delicious.

After an hour's dashing drive, he arrived at a city which, had he not seen Hubbabub, he should have imagined was one of the most considerable in the world; but compared with the Vraibleusian capital it was a street.

Shortly after his arrival, according to the custom of the place, Popanilla joined the public table of his hotel at dinner. He was rather surprised that, instead of knives and forks being laid for the convenience of the guests, the plates were flanked by daggers and pistols. As Popanilla now made a point of never asking a question of Skindeep, he addressed himself for information to his other neighbour, one of the civilest, most hospitable, and joyous rogues that ever set a table in a roar. On Popanilla inquiring the reason of their using these singular instruments, his neighbour, with an air of great astonishment, confessed his ignorance of any people ever using any other; and in his turn asked how they could possibly eat their dinner without. The Chevalier was puzzled, but he was now too well bred ever to pursue an inquiry.

Popanilla, being thirsty, helped himself to a goblet of water, which was at hand. It was the most delightful water that he ever tasted. In a few minutes he found that he was a little dizzy, and, supposing this megrim to be occasioned by the heat of the room, he took another draught of water to recover himself.

As his neighbour was telling him an excellent joke a man entered the room and shot the joker through the head. The opposite guest immediately charged his pistol with effect, and revenged the loss. A party of men, well armed, now rushed in, and a brisk conflict immediately ensued. Popanilla, who was very dizzy, was fortunately pushed under the table. When the firing and slashing had ceased, he ventured to crawl out. He found that the assailants had been beaten off, though unfortunately with the total loss of all the guests, who lay lifeless about the room. Even the prudent Skindeep, who had sought refuge in a closet, had lost his nose, which was a pity; because, although this gentleman had never been in Blunderland before, he had passed his whole life in maintaining that the accounts of the disturbances in that country were greatly exaggerated. Popanilla rang the bell, and the waiters, who were remarkably attentive, swept away the dead bodies, and brought him a roasted potato for supper.

The Chevalier soon retired to rest. He found at the side of his bed a blunderbuss, a cutlass, and a pike; and he was directed to secure the door of his chamber with a great chain and a massy iron bar. Feeling great confidence in his securities, although he was quite ignorant of the cause of alarm, and very much exhausted with the bustle of the day, he enjoyed sounder sleep than had refreshed him for many weeks. He was awakened in the middle of the night by a loud knocking at his door. He immediately seized his blunderbuss, but, recognising the voice of his own valet, he only took his pike. His valet told him to unbar without loss of time, for the house had been set on fire. Popanilla immediately made his escape, but found himself surrounded by the incendiaries. He gave himself up for lost, when a sudden charge of cavalry brought him off in triumph. He was convinced of the utility of light-horse.

The military had arrived with such dispatch that the fire was the least effective that had wakened the house for the whole week. It was soon extinguished, and Popanilla again retired to his bedroom, not forgetting his bar and his chain.

In the morning Popanilla was roused by his landlord, who told him that a large party was about to partake of the pleasures of the chase, and most politely inquired whether he would like to join them. Popanilla assented, and after having eaten an excellent breakfast, and received a favourable bulletin of Skindeep's wound, he mounted his horse. The party was numerous and well armed. Popanilla inquired of a huntsman what sport they generally followed in Blunderland. According to the custom of this country, where they never give a direct answer, the huntsman said that he did not know that there was any other sport but one. Popanilla thought him a brute, and dug his spurs into his horse.

They went off at a fine rate, and the exercise was most exhilarating. In a short time, as they were cantering along a defile, they received a sharp fire from each side, which rather reduced their numbers; but they revenged themselves for this loss when they regained the plain, where they burnt two villages, slew two or three hundred head of women, and bagged children without number. On their return home to dinner they chased a small body of men over a heath for nearly two hours, which afforded good sport; but they did not succeed in running them down, as they themselves were in turn chased by another party. Altogether, the day was not deficient of interest, and Popanilla found in the evening his powers of digestion improved.

After passing his days in this manner for about a fortnight, Popanilla perfectly recovered from his dyspepsia; and Skindeep's wound having now healed, he retired with regret from this healthy climate. He took advantage of the leisure moment which was afforded during the sail to inquire the reason of the disturbed state of this interesting country. He was told that it was in consequence of the majority of the inhabitants persisting in importing their own pine-apples.

CHAPTER XVI

On his return to Hubbabub, the Chevalier de Fantaisie found the city in the greatest confusion. The military were marshalled in all directions; the streets were lined with field-pieces; no one was abroad; all the shops were shut. Although not a single vehicle was visible, Popanilla's progress was slow, from the quantity of shells of all kinds which choked up the public way. When he arrived at his hotel he found that all the windows were broken. He entered, and his landlord immediately presented him with his bill. As the landlord was pressing, and as Popanilla wished for an opportunity of showing his confidence in Skindeep's friendship, he requested him to pay the amount. Skindeep sent a messenger immediately to his banker, deeming an ambassador almost as good security as a nation, which we all know to be the very best.

This little arrangement being concluded, the landlord resumed his usual civility. He informed the travellers that the whole island was in a state of the greatest commotion, and that martial law universally prevailed. He said that this disturbance was occasioned by the return of the expedition destined to the Isle of Fantaisie. It appeared, from his account, that after sailing about from New Guinea to New Holland, the expedition had been utterly unable not only to reach their new customers, but even to obtain the slightest intelligence of their locality. No such place as Fantaisie was known at Ceylon. Sumatra gave information equally unsatisfactory. Java shook its head. Celebes conceived the inquirers were jesting. The Philippine Isles offered to accommodate them with spices, but could assist them in no other way. Had it not been too hot at Borneo, they would have fairly laughed outright. The Maldives and the Moluccas, the Luccadives and the Andamans, were nearly as impertinent. The five hundred ships and the judiciously assorted cargo were therefore under the necessity of returning home.

No sooner, however, had they reached Vraïbleusia than the markets were immediately glutted with the unsold goods. All the manufacturers, who had been working day and night in preparing for the next expedition, were instantly thrown out of employ. A run commenced on the Government Bank. That institution perceived too late that the issues of pink shells had been too unrestricted. As the Emperor of the East had all the gold, the Government Bank only protected itself from failure by bayoneting its creditors. The manufacturers, who were starving, consoled themselves for the absence of food by breaking all the windows in the country with the discarded shells. Every tradesman failed. The shipping interest advertised two or three fleets for firewood. Riots were universal. The Aboriginal was attacked on all sides, and made so stout a resistance, and broke so many cudgels on the backs of his assailants, that it was supposed he would be finally exhausted by his own exertions. The public funds sunk ten per cent. daily. All the Millionaires crashed. In a word, dismay, disorganisation, despair, pervaded in all directions the wisest, the greatest, and the richest nation in the world. The master of the hotel added, with an air of becoming embarrassment, that, had not his Excellency been fortunately absent, he probably would not have had the pleasure of detailing to him this little narrative; that he had often been inquired for by the populace at his old balcony; and that a crowd had perpetually surrounded the house till within the last day, when a report had got about that his Excellency had turned into steam and disappeared. He added that caricatures of his Highness might be procured in any shop, and his account of his voyage obtained at less than half-price.

"Ah!" said Popanilla, in a tone of great anguish, "and all this from losing a lock of hair!"

At this moment the messenger whom Skindeep had dispatched returned, and informed him with great regret that his banker, to whom he had entrusted his whole fortune, had been so unlucky as to stop payment during his absence. It was expected, however, that when his stud was sold a respectable dividend might be realised. This was the personage of prepossessing appearance who had presented Popanilla with a perpetual ticket to his picture gallery. On examining the banker's accounts, it was discovered that his chief loss had been incurred by supporting that competition establishment where purses were bought full of crowns.

In spite of his own misfortunes, Popanilla hastened to console his friend. He explained to him that things were not quite so bad as they appeared; that society consisted of two classes, those who laboured, and those who paid the labourers; that each class was equally useful, because, if there were none to pay, the labourers would not be remunerated, and if there were none to labour, the payers would not be accommodated; that Skindeep might still rank in one of these classes; that he might therefore still be a useful member of society; that, if he were useful, he must therefore be good; and that, if he were good, he must therefore be happy; because happiness is the consequence of assisting the beneficial development of the ameliorating principles of the social action.

As he was speaking, two gentlemen in blue, with red waistcoats, entered the chamber and seized Popanilla by the collar. The Vraibleusian Government, which is so famous for its interpretation of National Law, had arrested the Ambassador for high treason.

CHAPTER XVII

A PRISON conveyed the most lugubrious ideas to the mind of the unhappy plenipotentiary; and shut up in a hackney-coach, with a man on each side of him with a cocked pistol, he formed the most gloomy conceptions of dark dungeons, confined cells, overwhelming fetters, black bread, and green water. He arrived at the principal gaol in Hubbabub. He was ushered into an elegantly furnished apartment, with French sash windows and a piano. Its lofty walls were entirely hung with a fanciful paper, which represented a Tuscan vineyard; the ceiling was covered with sky and clouds; roses were in abundance; and the windows, though well secured, excited no jarring associations in the mind of the individual they illumined, protected, as they were, by polished bars of cut steel. This retreat had been fitted up by a poetical politician, who had recently been confined for declaring that the Statue was an old idol originally imported from the Sandwich Isles. Taking up a brilliantly bound volume which reposed upon a rosewood table, Popanilla recited aloud a sonnet to Liberty; but the account given of the goddess by the bard was so confused, and he seemed so little acquainted with his subject, that the reader began to suspect it was an effusion of the gaoler.

Next to being a plenipotentiary, Popanilla preferred being a prisoner. His daily meals consisted of every delicacy in season: a marble bath was ever at his service; a billiard-room and dumb-bells always ready; and his old friend, the most eminent physician and the most celebrated practitioner in Hubbabub, called upon him daily to feel his pulse and look at his tongue. These attentions authorised a hope that he might yet again be an Ambassador, that his native land might still be discovered, and its resources still be developed: but when his gaoler told him that the rest of the prisoners were treated in a manner equally indulgent, because the Vraibleusians are the most humane people in the world, Popanilla's spirits became somewhat depressed.

He was greatly consoled, however, by a daily visit from a body of the most beautiful, the most accomplished, and the most virtuous females in Hubbabub, who tasted his food to see that his cook did his duty, recommended him a plentiful use of pine-apple well peppered, and made him a present of a very handsome shirt, with worked frills and ruffles, to be hanged in. This enchanting committee generally confined their attentions to murderers and other victims of the passions, who were deserted in their hour of need by the rest of the society they had outraged; but Popanilla, being a foreigner, a Prince, and a plenipotentiary, and not ill-looking, naturally attracted a great deal of notice from those who desire the amelioration of their species.

Popanilla was so pleased with his mode of life, and had acquired such a taste for poetry, pine-apples, and pepper since he had ceased to be an active member of society, that he applied to have his trial postponed, on the ground of the prejudice which had been excited against him by the public press. As his trial was at present inconvenient to the Government, the postponement was allowed on these grounds.

In the meantime, the public agitation was subsiding. The nation reconciled itself to the revolution in its fortunes. The *ci-devant* Millionaires were busied with retrenchment; the Government engaged in sweeping in as many pink shells as were lying about the country; the mechanics contrived to live upon chalk and seaweed; and as the Aboriginal would not give his corn away gratis, the Vraibleusians determined to give up bread. The intellectual part of the nation were intently interested in discovering the cause of the National Distress. One of the philosophers said that it might all be traced to the effects of a war in which the Vraibleusians had engaged about a century before. Another showed that it was altogether clearly ascribable to the pernicious custom of issuing pink shells; but if, instead of this mode of representing wealth, they had had recourse to blue shells, the nation would now have advanced to a state of prosperity which it had never yet reached. A third demonstrated to the satisfaction of himself and his immediate circle that it was all owing to the Statue having recently been repaired with silver instead of iron. The public were unable to decide between these conflicting opinions; but they were still more desirous of finding out a remedy for the evil than the cause of it.

An eloquent and philosophical writer, who entertains consolatory opinions of human nature, has recently told us that "it is in the nature of things that the intellectual wants of society should be supplied. Whenever the man is required invariably the man will appear." So it happened in the present instance. A public instructor jumped up in the person of Mr. Flummery Flam, the least insinuating and the least plausible personage that ever performed the easy task of gulling a nation. His manners were vulgar, his voice was sharp, and his language almost unintelligible. Flummery Flam was a provisional optimist. He maintained that everything would be for the best, if the nation would only follow his advice. He told the Vraibleusians that the present universal and overwhelming distress was all and entirely and merely to be ascribed to "a slight over-trading," and that all that was required to set everything right again was "a little time." He showed that this over-trading and every other injudicious act that had ever been committed were entirely to be ascribed to the nation being imbued with erroneous and imperfect ideas of the nature of Demand and Supply. He proved to them that if a tradesman cannot find customers his goods will generally stay upon his own hands. He explained to the Aboriginal the meaning of *rent;* to the mechanics the nature of *wages;* to the manufacturers the signification of *profits*. He recommended that a large edition of his own work should be printed at the public expense and sold for his private profit. Finally, he explained how immediate, though temporary, relief would be afforded to the State by the encouragement of EMIGRATION.

The Vraibleusians began to recover their spirits. The Government had the highest confidence in Flummery Flam, because Flummery Flam served to divert the public thoughts. By his direction lectures were instituted at the corner of every street, to instil the right principles of politics into the mind of the great body of the people. Every person, from the Managers of the Statue down to the chalk-chewing mechanics, attended lectures on Flummery-Flammism. The Vraibleusians suddenly discovered that it was the great object of a nation not to be the most powerful, or the richest, or the best, or the wisest, but to be the most Flummery-Flammistical.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE day fixed for Popanilla's trial was at hand. The Prince was not unprepared for the meeting. For some weeks before the appointed day he had been deeply studying the published speeches of the greatest rhetorician that flourished at the Vraibleusian bar. He was so inflated with their style that he nearly blew down the gaoler every morning when he rehearsed a passage before him. Indeed, Popanilla looked forward to his trial with feelings of anticipated triumph. He determined boldly and fearlessly to state the principles upon which his public conduct had been founded, the sentiments he professed on most of the important subjects which interest mankind, and the views he entertained of the progress of society. He would then describe, in the most glowing language, the domestic happiness which he enjoyed in his native isle. He would paint, in harrowing sentences, the eternal misery and disgrace which his ignominious execution would entail upon the greyheaded father, who looked up to him as a prop for his old age; the affectionate mother, who perceived in him her husband again a youth; the devoted wife, who could never survive his loss; and the sixteen children, chiefly girls, whom his death would infallibly send upon the parish. This, with an eulogistic peroration on the moral qualities of the Vraibleusians and the political importance of Vraibleusia, would, he had no doubt, not only save his neck, but even gain him a moderate pension.

The day arrived, the Court was crowded, and Popanilla had the satisfaction of observing in the newspapers that tickets for the best gallery to witness his execution were selling at a premium.

The indictment was read. He listened to it with intense attention. To his surprise, he found himself accused of stealing two hundred and nineteen Camelopards. All was now explained. He perceived that he had been mistaken the whole of this time for another person. He could not contain himself. He burst into an exclamation. He told the judge, in a voice of mingled delight, humility, and triumph, that it was possible he might be guilty of high treason, because he was ignorant of what the crime consisted; but as for stealing two hundred and nineteen Camelopards, he declared that such a larceny was a moral impossibility, because he had never seen one such animal in the whole course of his life.

The judge was kind and considerate. He told the prisoner that the charge of stealing Camelopards was a fiction of law; that he had no doubt he had never seen one in the whole course of his life, nor in all probability had any one in the whole Court. He explained to Popanilla, that originally this animal greatly abounded in Vraibleusia; that the present Court, the highest and most ancient in the kingdom, had then been instituted for the punishment of all those who molested or injured that splendid animal. The species, his lordship continued, had been long extinct; but the Vraibleusians, duly reverencing the institutions of their ancestors, had never presumed to abrogate the authority of the Camelopard Court, or invest any other with equal privileges. "Therefore," his lordship added, "in order to try you in this Court for a modern offence of high treason, you must first be introduced by fiction of law as a stealer of Camelopards, and then being *in præsenti regio*, in a manner, we proceed to business by a special power for the absolute offence." Popanilla was so confounded by the kindness of the judge and the clearness of his lordship's statement that he quite lost the thread of his peroration.

The trial proceeded. Everybody with whom Popanilla had conversed during his visit to Vraibleusia was subpœnaed against him, and the evidence was conclusive. Skindeep, who was brought up by a warrant from the King's Bench, proved the fact of Popanilla's landing; and that he had given himself out as a political exile, the victim of a tyrant, a corrupt aristocracy, and a misguided people. But, either from a secret feeling towards his former friend or from his aversion to answer questions, this evidence was on the whole not very satisfactory.

The bookseller proved the publication of that fatal volume whose deceptive and glowing statements were alone sufficient to ensure Popanilla's fate. It was in vain that the author avowed that he had never written a line of his own book. This only made his imposture more evident. The little philosopher with whom he had conversed at Lady Spirituelle's, and who, being a friend of Flummery Flam, had now obtained a place under Government, invented the most condemning evidence. The Marquess of Moustache sent in a state paper, desiring to be excused from giving evidence, on account of the delicate situation in which he had been placed with regard to the prisoner; but he referred them to his former Private Secretary, who, he had no doubt, would afford every information. Accordingly, the President of Fort Jobation, who had been brought over specially, finished the business.

The Judge, although his family had suffered considerably by the late madness for speculation, summed up in the most impartial manner. He told the jury that, although the case was quite clear against the prisoner, they were bound to give him the advantage of every reasonable doubt. The foreman was about to deliver the verdict, when a trumpet sounded, and a Government messenger ran breathless into Court. Presenting a scroll to the presiding genius, he informed him that a remarkably able young man, recently appointed one of the Managers of the Statue, in consequence of the inconvenience which the public sustained from the innumerable quantity of edicts of the Statue at present in force, had last night consolidated them all into this single act, which, to render its operation still more simple, was gifted with a retrospective power for the last half-century.

His lordship, looking over the scroll, passed a high eulogium upon the young consolidator, compared to whom, he said, Justinian was a country attorney. Observing, however, that the crime of high treason had been accidentally omitted in the consolidated legislation of Vraibleusia, he directed the jury to find the prisoner "not guilty." As in Vraibleusia the law believes every man's character to be perfectly pure until a jury of twelve persons find the reverse, Popanilla was kicked out of Court, amid the hootings of the mob, without a stain upon his reputation.

It was late in the evening when he left the Court. Exhausted both in mind and body, the mischief being now done, and being totally unemployed, according to custom, he began to moralise. "I begin to perceive," said he, "that it is possible for a nation to exist in too artificial a state; that a people may both think too much and do too much. All here exists in a state of exaggeration. The nation itself professes to be in a situation in which it is impossible for any nation ever to be naturally placed. To maintain themselves in this false position, they necessarily have recourse to much destructive conduct and to many fictitious principles. And as the character of a people is modelled on that of their Government, in private life this system of exaggeration equally prevails, and equally produces a due quantity of ruinous actions and false sentiment! In the meantime, I am starving, and dare not show my face in the light of day!"

As he said this the house opposite was suddenly lit up, and the words "EMIGRATION COMMITTEE" were distinctly visible on a transparent blind. A sudden resolution entered Popanilla's mind to make an application to this body. He entered the Committee-room, and took his place at the end of a row of individuals, who were severally examined. When it was his turn to come forward he began to tell his story from the beginning, and would certainly have got to the lock of hair had not the President enjoined silence. Popanilla was informed that the last Emigration-squadron was about to sail in a few minutes; and that, although the number was completed, his broad shoulders and powerful frame had gained him a place. He was presented with a spade, a blanket, and a hard biscuit, and in a quarter of an hour was quitting the port of Hubbabub.

Once more upon the waters, yet once more!

As the Emigration-squadron quitted the harbour two large fleets hove in sight. The first was the expedition which had been dispatched against the decapitating King of the North, and which now returned heavily laden with his rescued subjects. The other was the force which had flown to the preservation of the body of the decapitated King of the South, and which now brought back his Majesty embalmed, some Princes of the blood, and an emigrant Aristocracy.

What became of the late Fantaisian Ambassador; whether he were destined for Van Diemen's Land or for Canada; what rare adventures he experienced in Sydney, or Port Jackson, or Guelph City, or Goodrich Town; and whether he discovered that man might exist in too natural a state, as well as in too artificial a one, will probably be discovered, if ever we obtain Captain Popanilla's Second Voyage.

W. HARRISON AINSWORTH

(1805–1882)

WILLIAM HARRISON AINSWORTH, educated at Manchester Grammar School, was articled to a solicitor of that city in 1821. In 1824 he proceeded to London to complete his legal training, but by 1826 he was in business as a publisher, Scott not disdaining to appear in one of his annuals. His first novel of importance, *Rockwood* (1834), was immediately successful. After editing successively *Bentley's Miscellany* (1840–2), and *Ainsworth's Magazine* (1842–54), he acquired *The New Monthly Magazine*. He wrote thirty-nine historical novels, of which the best known are *Jack Sheppard* (1839), *The Tower of London* (1840), *Old St. Paul's* (1841), and *Windsor Castle* (1843).

"Mary Stukeley" is reprinted from *December Tales*.

MARY STUKELEY

My prime of youth is but a frost of cares,
  My feast of joy is but a dish of pain;
My crop of corn is but a field of tares,
  And all my goods is but vain hope of gain:
The day is fled—and yet I saw no sun,
And now I live—and now my life is done!
—CHIDIOCK TICHEBOURNE.

I AM no fatalist; but if ever individual was subject to the influence of a prevailing destiny—a destiny which has blighted his hopes, and run counter to all the views and prospects of his life, and changed completely his situation, habits, feelings, and almost transformed him into a different being—I am that one.

But I have no wish to extenuate my faults or crimes, with the flimsy excuse that my actions were controlled by some unknown but powerfully operating cause, compelling me to pursue a preordained course of existence: on the contrary, I am persuaded that such a doctrine is wholly inconsistent with the principles of religion, and subversive of morality: no, I know that I was free from the first to choose between good and evil; that I had a perpetual option of adopting or rejecting any given course of action: unhappily my choice was an erroneous one, nor did I perceive my mistake till it could not be rectified.

Without violent passions, and naturally disposed to quiet and retirement, I have been, by some concurrence of circumstances, reduced to a state of misery, which has dried up the natural current of my feelings, and rendered my heart, once the habitation of the tenderest emotions, a wilderness and place of burning sorrow.

The early years of my life I pass over as being of no importance to my story. They passed in a regular, uninterrupted course of happiness. They are days that we recur to with feelings of pleasure and regret; days of joy, that once gone never again return; "for life's enchanted cup but sparkles near the brim." Yet, though we dwell on them with feelings of rapture, they are times of which little can be said by the biographer of his own life. Their very serenity, and the uniformity of their placid delights, precludes the possibility of making them part of a narration. Like a landscape of level country, which we look upon with pleasure, but without intense feelings of admiration, they present no prominent points of view on which the writer can dwell. It is with unusual occurrences—with narrations of deep misfortune or vivifying joy—the harsh rocks and dazzling beauties of the landscape of life, that he has to deal.

I was about the age when youth begins to be lost in manhood, when I saw Mary Stukeley. I was on a visit to a friend's. Rambling one morning among the most beautiful scenery I ever knew, I saw this fair creature, I saw and loved her. I know these first-sighted affections are not much in vogue at this time of the day. I even ackowledge the justness of the ridicule which is thrown out with an unsparing hand against them: like most other reasoners, making an exception in favour of my own peculiar case.

I lost no time in inquiring after the divinity who had engaged my heart, and learnt she was the daughter of a neighbouring gentleman, a widower. I learnt also that her pecuniary expectations were not great. But what was this to me? I had enough for us both. Besides, what lover of one-and-twenty ever inquired into his mistress's rent-roll, or sought for other treasures than were contained in her own lovely self? She had a brother, about a year older than herself. I wrote to my parents, to obtain their approbation of my choice; it was easily granted, and I assailed my charmer with all love's artillery of sighs, and entreaties, and letters, and everything which I thought might win her smile. I was not altogether without success. She listened to me with patience, and, I flattered myself, with pleasure: I pressed my suit, and, at last she acknowledged that she loved me.

Beautiful visions of former happiness! Why must my reminiscences of joy be ever accompanied with a pang at the comparison of past and present state? Yet, though I reflect on it with the severest pain, there are thoughts connected with the subject, which I dwell upon, if not with pleasure, yet with something approaching to it. I cannot help feeling a complacent emotion at remembering, that a being like Mary did not think me unworthy her esteem and affection. I love to think of the walks we have had together, when the mournful rustling of winds among the trees and long grass, and the lengthening shadows, told us the approach of evening. I cannot forget the feeling with which I then looked upon the beauties of nature. My heart had not then lost its facility of receiving such impressions; it was not blunted with the attacks of grief, nor jaundiced with the bitterness of disappointment. Those were happy days—when, with her hand clasped in mine, and her beautiful eyes beaming love, we wandered o'er plains and valleys—

> . . . Where streamy mountains swell
> Their shadowy grandeur o'er the narrow dell;
> Where mouldering piles and forests intervene,
> Mingling with darker tints the living green;
> No circling hills the ravish'd eye to bound,
> Heaven, Earth, and Ocean blazing all around!

—Such was my first love, and there are feelings in a first love which no subsequent attachment can yield. The realisation of those visions that the imagination has long been wont to create, and the mind to dwell upon; the floating and indistinct ideas (more beautiful from their very undefinedness) of rapture, and confidence, and happiness, which the warmth of youthful feeling infuses into youthful hearts; the novelty of the emotion; the exquisite vibration of hope, and fear, and joy, and sadness, the devotedness with which the soul is given up to one object, and one passion, conspire to give charms to the dream of first love, which are but faintly shadowed in a subsequent attachment.

The day was fixed for our marriage. I anticipated it, as may be conceived, with ecstatic joy. I thought my bliss was certain. Alas! how soon was I to find the futility of such hopes! The evening before the appointed day, I walked out alone, to enjoy, uninterrupted, the pleasure of my varied emotions. Mary was at home, reading a new work I had procured for her. It was a lovely summer's evening. The sun had set, the day had been intensely hot, and the lightning blazed from the sky in vivid sheets. I gazed on it with pleasure as it flashed from the ether, and was reflected on the rippling waves of the river, which ran beside me. On the banks of the stream dark evergreens lifted their frowning tops, mingled with the lighter green of the willow and the beech. A lovely country spread itself around me in every direction, and the view was terminated by the dusky blue mountains that rose in dim majesty, scarcely distinguishable from the clouds that rolled on their tops. I stood to look on the scene, and enjoy the freshness of the air. I was filled with pleasant musings. I was in a state of what might be called affluence. I was a lover and beloved, and the next day was to crown my happiness. How little I imagined what to-morrow would bring forth—that I should be a fugitive and a wanderer!

While I was thus engaged, a female passed by me, at a little distance. She was above the middle size, of a commanding appearance, and the most expressive countenance I think I ever beheld. She was not, perhaps, what many might call beautiful, but I never knew any one who possessed so much the power of interesting at a first look. Her face was rather pale, but the features were striking, and her dark eye threw a vivid intelligence over their expression. Her black hair was curled in ringlets that clustered about her temples, and one lock waved down upon a beautifully shaped neck. There was perceivable, too, a lurking trace of the darker passions, which seemed to be disguised under an habitually assumed look of softness. By her dress, she appeared below the middle station of society; but there was a dignity, an ease in her manner, which repelled the idea. I certainly, for the time, forgot the subjects of which I had been thinking—even Mary's image slipped from my mind.

As she was pursuing her road, her foot slipped, and she fell. I flew to assist her, and inquired if her fall had done her injury. She complained of having sprained her ankle, and I offered her my arm, which, after some excuses and apologies, she accepted. I really cannot tell how it was, but I felt a strange emotion at being thus situated. I was pleased—I certainly ought not then to have been pleased, at least particularly pleased, by the society of any woman but one—I said, I was pleased, but it was a pleasure mixed with something like fear. There was something unaccountable about her, at least I thought so, which prevented me from feeling so at ease as I had always been with other females. A great part of this might be the fruit of imagination, for I had always a great inclination for the marvellous, and had spent many an hour, in my younger days, in framing plots of castles and knights, sphinxes, hypogriffs, and knights, and ladies, all mighty terrific and wonderful; as I thought then—

—Forms that bore
A shadowy likeness to those fabled things
That sprung of old from man's imaginings;
Each look'd a fierce reality—or seem'd
Nourish'd among the wonders of the deep,
And wilder than the poet ever dream'd!

—As we walked along, we conversed on various subjects. Her discourse was interesting, fluent, and animated, perhaps too much so, for it was interspersed with remarks whose general truth and well-directed pungency scarcely atoned for their freedom and boldness, which I did not altogether admire: perhaps she perceived this, for she changed the style of her conversation, and I began to listen to her with considerable delight. It may be mentioned, as an instance of my absence of mind whilst in her company, that I forgot to think, far less to inquire, where we were going. Indeed, I seemed to be in a dream—a dream, the awakening from which has been terrible.

We arrived at a spot, the most delightful I ever beheld. The earth sank in a kind of natural basin, the sides of which were covered with the highest green, and enamelled with the loveliest flowers: harebells, daisies, "wee crimson-tipped flowers," and innumerable others, of all colours, gushed out in profusion. Water-lilies waved their graceful heads on the brink of a spring that bubbled from the bottom of the spot, and oozing away through the long grass and weeds which impeded its progress, trickled down its narrow channel with almost imperceptible murmurings.

My companion complaining of increasing pain, occasioned, as she thought, by walking, we sat down on a large stone, which seemed to have lain there undisturbed by ages. A large oak spread over its branching arms, "the mossy growth of twice a hundred years," to which the ivy clung and twined about in fantastic wreathings. The magic of the spot, the light whispering of the winds through the quivering leaves, the gurgling of the brook as it boiled in mimic rage over the stones and other obstacles which presented themselves to its course; the perfume of the air, the witching hour, joined with a strange feeling of inquietude, the cause of which I feared to search into, overpowered my senses and unhinged my faculties. A thought of Mary intruded itself on me, for the first time; I felt it an intrusion, and strove to banish it.

Meanwhile my companion had remained silent: at last she spoke, in a sportive manner, to me on the cause of my abstraction. I did not answer, and plucking a flower from the ground, she offered it to me. I snatched at it: I caught her hand in mine; she smiled, and I was at her feet!—

I was startled by the approach of a footstep. I looked up, and to my confusion, beheld the brother of Mary. He had never been favourable to my passion for his sister, and I feared the worst consequences from his rage and dislike to me. I flew to him; he passed on, and strove to avoid me, but I followed, and overtook him. I said something about explanations. "Sir," he replied, "I wish for no further explanations; the thing explains itself. Meanwhile I wish at present to be alone. I wish you a good night." I remonstrated with him, and he replied in terms which, however warm, were, I must confess, authorised by my conduct. To be brief, our quarrel became serious, he gave me a challenge, I accepted it, and we parted.

I rushed home in a state of madness. At the gate I met Mary: she laughed, and playfully attempted to stop me, but I passed by with a violence that allowed no time for converse. I flew to my room, and, flinging myself into a chair, gave myself up to the flood of passion and misery that overwhelmed me.

And when I reflected, it was misery. I had been seduced (I could not think by what evil influence) from the allegiance I owed to Mary —to her who, to-morrow, should become my wife; and, ere the nuptial hour should arrive, I might be the murderer, or have fallen by the hand, of her brother. At any rate, it was probable, almost certain, that he would disclose what he knew; it might be, nay, was it not likely that she should feel indignant at my conduct, and cast me off as unworthy of her? I was filled with agonising apprehensions; the tumult of my mind was dreadful.

In about an hour would be the time at which I was to meet Mary's brother. I took out my pistols and loaded them, and was almost ready to use them to put an end to my existence. Whilst I was thus employed, I heard a gentle rap at the door. I went and opened it, and found Mary. I went back, and she followed me. The first thing she saw was my pistols, which I had forgotten to conceal. "What are these for?" was her question, pointing to them. I was so confounded that, for some time, I could make no answer. At last, I said that I had been cleaning them. I looked at her; her eyes were swollen, and inflamed with weeping, and I cursed myself for bringing misery on her. She held out her hand to me. "What ails you? You seem unwell." I took her hand. "Mary, forgive me," and I clasped her in my arms, and wept over her in convulsive sorrow. She was alarmed at my behaviour and earnestly entreated me to tell her the cause of it. I became more calm. She spoke with me for some time, and I had resolved to disclose the whole to her, when, the clock striking, reminded me of my engagement. I threw myself on her neck, talked something incoherently about her brother, and snatching up my pistols, I broke from her.

I rushed, in this state of desperation, towards the place appointed for our meeting, when, passing through a grove which had sheltered the back of the house, someone caught me by the arm. I looked, and it was the detested being, the woman through whom I had brought myself into my present situation. I would rather have met with the sight of a basilisk. I endeavoured to get away, but she commanded me to stay, and I obeyed. "You hate me," she said: "I have been, unwillingly, the cause of your quarrel with the brother of your intended wife: nay be patient, I am here to serve you. I overheard all; I know where you are going; it is now in vain, he is dead." "Dead!" I exclaimed, "who is dead? Speak, woman." "Stukeley!" For some time I could not speak. Horror and amazement deprived me of all power of utterance. "Tell me, how was this? who did it? when or where was it?" "Immediately after I had overheard the conversation between you and him," she continued, "I left the spot. In an hour after that time he was found murdered. No robbery had been committed on his person; his watch, and what money he had, were safe. Suspicion has fallen on you, and——" "On me, and why?" "Ask nothing," she replied, "time presses; in a short time you will (unless you save yourself by flight) be apprehended. The evidence is strong against you; someone heard you quarrel; he was seen with no one else. As you returned you passed by the Deadman's Hill, as they call it, a place out of the common road, and near where the body was found. Your strange behaviour, when you arrived at the house, was noticed by the servants. Whether you are guilty or not, you know best. I have told you what I have heard. But haste; every moment brings increasing danger. There are horses in the stable." She dragged me on, for I was so bewildered with the dreadful information, that I possessed scarcely any power over myself. We stopped at the stable door, she left me, and in a few moments brought forth a horse, which she had herself saddled and bridled. "No," said I, "I will not fly; I am innocent, and fear nothing." "This is mere madness," she rejoined; "fly for the present; hereafter you may return; the real murderer will probably be discovered; circumstances now overpower you and you must yield to them." In the state of confusion in which I was, I was easily prevailed upon to do anything. "That is your safest road; go to London, there you may be safe; inquire for John Bell, the basket-maker, in —— Street. I will overtake you; conceal yourself. But you will want money; take this," and she put a purse, seemingly well furnished, into my hand. I endeavoured to thank her. I forgot what evil she had been the cause of to me. "Say nothing," she interrupted; "remember the misery I have brought upon you; perhaps," she added, "you will not forget that I have endeavoured to atone for it." There was something in her words and manner that touched me. "Someone comes," she said; "begone—farewell." She disappeared, and I pursued, as swiftly as I could, the road she had pointed out to me.

In the evening of the next day I arrived at the metropolis, faint and weary with exertion. My first course was to inquire for the place to which I had been directed. I found it with considerable difficulty. It was a small, dirty, uncomfortable house; but any place of refuge was acceptable. I inquired if I could have lodgings there. The man eyed me narrowly, and beckoning to his wife (I suppose to look well after me) he went into a back room, from which he soon returned, and asked me in. I entered, and found, to my surprise, the woman whom I had left when I departed from P——. She perceived my astonishment, and said, "You see I am a quick traveller. I came by a nearer, but more public road than you, which is the reason of my being here before you." She then ordered in some refreshment which we ate together. We spoke little, and I shortly retired for the night.

I retired, but not to rest, for the tumult of my thoughts effectually precluded sleep. Two days before, I was happy; all my wishes were about to be crowned with fulfilment, and I had scarce a hope or desire for more; and now, how different was my state! I was a fugitive and a wanderer; a proclaimed felon; branded as a murderer; compelled to shun society, and to hide myself from the light of day. And Mary! what would she think of my conduct? I was charged with the murder of her brother. I had fled from justice, and, of course, my guilt would be proclaimed. And would she, too, think me a villain? Would she banish me from her memory, or think of me only with hatred and abhorrence? These were questions I feared to answer. Appearances were strongly against me, and though hope whispered that Mary would frame excuses for my conduct, and disbelieve the story of my guilt, yet it was possible, it was most probable, that it would be otherwise. From Mary my thoughts turned to her who had been the cause of this misery. There certainly was something in her that excited not mere interest: it was not admiration, for she was rather to be feared than admired; it was something which powerfully attracted my thoughts towards her, and kept her idea almost continually in view. I was unable to discover why she had taken any interest in me; for that she did so, her conduct made evident. Why should she follow me, assist, and conceal me? What could I be to her? Before that fatal day, I had never, to my knowledge, so much as seen her. I ran over the events of the evening when I saw her. I could scarcely think that accident alone had produced the meeting which had led to such important consequences. Then the murder of Mary's brother, happening at that exact time, and attended with such circumstances, perplexed me. Such were the thoughts, which, for a long time, prevented me from reposing in slumber. At last I slept, but my sleeping were more dreadful than my waking hours. Horrid visions thronged around me. Now I saw the murdered Stukeley, struggling with someone, whose features I could not perceive, and crying out for vengeance against his murderer. Then the vision would disappear, and in its place was Mary, pale and frantic, seeking for him who had injured her. These, and a thousand other fantasies of a like nature, rose up to my distempered fancy. At last, morning came, and drove them away, but it was only to be succeeded by real and heartfelt miseries.

For near a month I continued here, during the whole of which I saw no one but the man of the house, his wife, and Eliza (for so she desired me to call her). The conduct of this last was singular. To all my inquiries as to her motives for attending to me, etc., she gave me none but general answers, which afforded me no information. Her behaviour was contrary to my expectation, particularly delicate, and seemingly that of a woman accustomed to the higher ranks of society. Let it not be imagined that any affection for her existed in my breast: all feelings of that nature were swallowed up in the attachment which, although hopeless, I still nourished for Mary. At last, a circumstance occurred which explained in some manner, the motives of her conduct.

One morning, whilst I was sitting in my wretched chamber, I was alarmed by a noise below, as of several persons quarrelling. I started up, and in a moment after, Eliza rushed into the room. "You are lost!" she exclaimed; "here are the officers of justice." "What," said I, "is there no refuge?—Well, then," I added, after a moment's pause, "let them come, I am ready to follow them." "No, no," she answered, "it must not be so. I cannot lose you thus. I love you: promise me that I shall be your wife, and I will save you." "No, never; I will perish first!" was my answer, for I could not bear the thought of ruining, by one blow, all my hopes of being united to Mary. The officers were approaching the door. "Decide," said my companion; "in a moment it will be too late." The thought of my situation, of the ignominious death to which I should probably be doomed, rushed into my mind, I shuddered at the prospect, and, almost fainting with agitation, I promised. Eliza opened a door, which I had never seen before, it had been concealed by an old screen, which was placed before it, and we descended into a kind of cellar. "Now you are safe," said she; "no one but myself is acquainted with this place." Here we remained until the noise above had, for some time, entirely ceased. At last my companion ventured up the steps by which we had descended, and returning, assured me that the coast was clear, and I ascended into the room. We sat down, and for some time continued silent, and without looking at each other. At last, I turned my eyes towards her. She looked at me with a fixed and steady gaze as if to pierce into the recesses of my soul. She rose; she advanced to me. "Do you remember your promise?" "I do, and am ready to fulfil it," was my reply. "You are ready to fulfil it," said she, "you are ready to give your hand when you cannot give your heart?—Be silent," she continued, as she perceived I was about to interrupt her. "You are ready to marry a woman whom you do not, cannot love. Aye, when you love another; when——" "This is too much!" I exclaimed; "why am I to be thus tormented? I have promised; I am willing to perform what I have promised; what more do you require?" "Nothing; nay, not so much. Think not that I am so vile a one; that, though a wretched and erring woman, I am so swallowed up in selfishness; that I have lost all feeling; that, though I love and avow it to you, I would make you mine by compelling you to sacrifice all that is dear to you." Her voice faltered; she turned away: in a moment after, collecting herself, she added, "I release you from your promise." She sank upon a chair, and wept.

I was now placed in a situation most embarrassing to me. I saw before me a woman who loved me; for I could not doubt the truth of what she said. And yet, when she had it in her power to indulge her wishes, by compelling the performance of my promise, she had generously disdained to take advantage of it, but had left me free to follow the bent of my inclination. And what return was I to make to this behaviour? Was I to consider myself as released from my engagement, and inflict misery upon one who had watched over me, and taken so deep an interest in my fate? I could not do it. I resolved to marry her. Probably I was influenced in this determination by the improbability of ever being united to her whom my heart had chosen as its fondest object of adoration. To be the husband of Mary seemed almost out of the reach of possibility. I walked up to Eliza; I took her hand. It is useless to relate our conversation. We were married.

I was married, to whom? strange as it may appear, I never knew. Indeed, when I look over this part of my life, I am inclined to regard the whole of it as a troubled dream. But the effects which I still fatally experience, tell too plainly that it was reality, and reality alone, which has wrought so great a change in me. Eliza was a woman, certainly of very superior talents; probably of violent and irregular passions. Of these, however, I knew little. During the short period of our union, her conduct was without reproach. Her faults (perhaps I am making use of too lenient an expression) were those of a strong mind, unrestrained by prudence, or the force of early restriction. The stream, which, if confined within proper limits, would have moved on in gentle calmness, spreading fertility in its course; if abandoned to its unchecked violence, rushes on a sweeping torrent of destruction: so had it been with her, and such will ever be the effect when a too vigorous imagination and talented confidence urge their possessor to pass the bounds which society has imposed upon its members.

Three days after this event, the real murderer of Stukeley was discovered. I might now return in safety to my home and to my friends. But there was one to whom I could not return. That happiness I had forfeited. I determined never again to see Mary. I removed with Eliza to a small house, at a considerable distance from the place in which I had been so long immured. She excelled in painting and needlework, and the produce of her labours maintained us both. I could not bear, however, to subsist by her exertions alone, and I resolved, when my health, which had been injured by my long confinement, was in some degree restored, to return and claim my property. It was near four months before I was able to commence my journey. I departed, however, and the next day brought me to my habitation. The congratulation of friends, the rejoicing of domestics, and other circumstances which took place at my return, are of too little importance to my narrative to be dwelt upon. In the course of a week my affairs were completely arranged, and I prepared to revisit London. It was a little past sunset when I passed the residence of Mary. What conflux of emotions thronged upon my mind! How short a time had passed over since, at this very spot, I had walked with her whom I had loved; and the bower in which we had sat at evening, and watched the beautiful setting of the sun as he sunk enveloped in clouds of many a varied hue. I could not resist the temptation of again taking a look at the beloved scenes. I was beside the garden: I fastened my horse to the stump of an old tree and sprang over the wall. I was surprised by a faint shriek. I turned round; in a moment I held Mary in my arms.

With what mingled feelings I pressed her to my breast! Joy, almost amounting to rapture, at again clasping the object of my affection; sorrow, shame, and disappointment embittered the meeting. She had heard, of course, of the discovery of the murderer of her brother, and rejoiced in the proof of my innocence. She inquired after the motives and manner of my escape, and where I had been since? I answered her questions, suppressing every circumstance relating to my wife. She pressed me to enter her house, and assured me that her friends were much interested in my fate. I suffered myself to be prevailed on. Why should I delay to complete my narration?—I loved her. Some months passed over, and we were married.

I know not what it was that thus far blunted the stings of conscience; but after this second marriage, I was miserable. In vain I found myself beloved and esteemed by all around me. I could not esteem: I could not do otherwise than hate myself. I reflected on my conduct towards Eliza; on her devotedness to me, which ought, in my eyes, to have counterbalanced all her failings. I was, indeed, most miserable: my spirits sunk; I was haunted by fearful visions; and I was weary of my existence. Mary perceived it, and inquired anxiously into the cause of it. I evaded her questions for a considerable time; at last, I confessed the whole to her.

From that moment her health declined. To think that she had united herself to one who had behaved so basely to another of her own sex, was terrible to her. She said little; but I perceived that the blow had struck to her heart, and I detested myself as the cause of it. It seemed as if I was destined to be the destruction of all who loved, trusted, and confided in me.

One evening we were seated in the bower, where, in happier days we had enjoyed such pure and unalloyed bliss. She had been in better health that day than for some time. We conversed with a pleasure which we had not felt for many a long and tedious day before. Towards the close of the evening she lost her vivacity, and became more thoughtful and pensive: leaning her head on my breast, she said, with a hollow voice: "I must leave you!" I was alarmed: I pressed her cheek to my lips. She attempted to rise, but sank on the ground—"I am dying!" I caught her in my arms: she was dead.

I have long been a wanderer; I have sought for rest, but in vain; the burning sting of remorse has rankled in my breast, and life has long been a burden to me. I have made many inquiries after Eliza, but in vain: peace be to her! In her good or bad qualities, probably no one now is interested but the wretched solitary who pens these lines. She will, with him, be forgotten. Oblivion, the refuge of the miserable, will shroud our names in its gloomy curtain.

Perhaps it might have been as well if oblivion had been suffered to fall over the events contained in this imperfect narrative, instead of adding another to the already countless records of human follies, and of human crimes; but it may serve to show the evil effects which ensue from the first false step. They cannot be foretold and are irremediable.

I have been loved; and now I am unknown and uncared for. I had friends, and am desolate. I have striven to bury my sorrow in the whirl of giddy pleasure; but pleasure has lost its excitement, and is succeeded by languor and disappointment. I might yet have known something like composure, but the very source of happiness was dried up—the sensibilities of my nature were blunted—the spring of the gentle affections flows no longer: apathy and despair are all that I can expect.

Oh! could I feel as I have felt, or be what I have been,
Or weep as I could once have wept o'er many a vanished scene;
As springs, in deserts found, seem sweet, all brackish though they be,
So, 'mid the wither'd waste of life, those tears would flow to me!

CHARLES LEVER

(1806–1872)

CHARLES JAMES LEVER entered Trinity College, Dublin, in 1822, and graduated in 1827. A period of travel in Holland, Germany, and subsequently Canada, preceded the study of medicine in Dublin. The first instalments of *Harry Lorrequer* appeared in the *Dublin University Magazine* in 1837. While practising medicine in Brussels, he found time to write *Charles O'Malley*. Subsequent works that came from his pen include *Jack Hinton, the Guardsman* (1843), *Tom Burke of Ours*, published in the *Dublin University Magazine* during his occupancy of the editorial chair; and *Arthur O'Leary* (1844). In 1857 he was appointed British vice-consul at Spezzia, and ten years later he was made consul at Trieste. He still plied an industrious pen and published a long series of novels that were written abroad.

"Con Cregan's Legacy" is reprinted from *The Confessions of Con Cregan.*

CON CREGAN'S LEGACY

WHEN we shall have become better acquainted, my worthy reader, there will be little necessity for my insisting upon a fact which, at this early stage of our intimacy, I deem it requisite to mention; namely, that my native modesty and bashfulness are only second to my veracity, and that while the latter quality in a manner compels me to lay an occasional stress upon my own goodness of heart, generosity, candour, and so forth, I have, notwithstanding, never introduced the subject without a pang—such a pang as only a sensitive and diffident nature can suffer or comprehend; there now, not another word of preface or apology!

I was born in a little cabin on the borders of Meath and King's County: it stood on a small triangular bit of ground, beside a cross-road; and although the place was surveyed every ten years or so, they were never able to say to which county we belonged, there being just the same number of arguments for one side as for the other—a circumstance, many believed, that decided my father in his original choice of the residence; for while, under the "disputed boundary question," he paid no rates or county cess, he always made a point of voting at both county elections! This may seem to indicate that my parent was of a naturally acute habit; and indeed the way he became possessed of the bit of ground will confirm that impression.

There was nobody of the rank of gentry in the parish, nor even squireen; the richest being a farmer, a snug old fellow, one Henry M'Cabe, that had two sons, who were always fighting between themselves which was to have the old man's money. Peter, the elder, doing everything to injure Mat, and Mat never backward in paying off the obligation. At last Mat, tired out in the struggle, resolved he would bear no more. He took leave of his father one night, and next day set off for Dublin, and 'listed in the "Buffs." Three weeks after, he sailed for India; and the old man, overwhelmed by grief, took to his bed, and never arose from it after.

Not that his death was any way sudden, for he lingered on for months longer; Peter always teasing him to make his will, and be revenged on "the dirty spalpeen" that disgraced the family: but old Harry as stoutly resisting, and declaring that whatever he owned should be fairly divided between them.

These disputes between them were well known in the neighbourhood. Few of the country people passing the house at night but had overheard the old man's weak reedy voice, and Peter's deep hoarse one, in altercation. When, at last—it was on a Sunday night—all was still and quiet in the house; not a word, not a footstep, could be heard, no more than if it were uninhabited, the neighbours looked knowingly at each other, and wondered if the old man were worse—if he were dead!

It was a little after midnight that a knock came to the door of our cabin. I heard it first, for I used to sleep in a little snug basket near the fire; but I didn't speak, for I was frightened. It was repeated still louder, and then came a cry: "Con Cregan; Con, I say, open the door! I want you." I knew the voice well; it was Peter M'Cabe's; but I pretended to be fast asleep, and snored loudly. At last my father unbolted the door, and I heard him say, "Oh, Mr. Peter, what's the matter? is the ould man worse?"

"Faix that's what he is! for he's dead!"

"Glory be his bed! when did it happen?"

"About an hour ago," said Peter, in a voice that even I from my corner could perceive was greatly agitated. "He died like an ould haythen, Con, and never made a will!"

"That's bad," says my father, for he was always a polite man, and said whatever was pleasing to the company.

"It is bad," said Peter; "but it would be worse if we couldn't help it. Listen to me now, Corny, I want ye to help me in this business; and here's five guineas in goold, if ye do what I bid ye. You know that ye were always reckoned the image of my father, and before he took ill ye were mistaken for each other every day of the week."

"Anan!" said my father; for he was getting frightened at the notion, without well knowing why.

"Well, what I want is, for ye to come over to the house, and get into the bed."

"Not besides the corpse?" said my father, trembling.

"By no means, but by yourself; and you're to pretend to be my father, and that ye want to make yer will before ye die; and then I'll send for the neighbours, and Billy Scanlan the schoolmaster, and ye'll tell him what to write, laving all the farm and everything to me—ye understand. And as the neighbours will see ye, and hear yer voice, it will never be believed but that it was himself that did it."

"The room must be very dark," says my father.

"To be sure it will, but have no fear! Nobody will dare to come nigh the bed; and ye'll only have to make a cross with yer pen under the name."

"And the priest?" said my father.

"My father quarrelled with him last week about the Easter dues: and Father Tom said he'd not give him the 'rites': and that's lucky now! Come along now, quick, for we've no time to lose: it must be all finished before the day breaks."

My father did not lose much time at his toilet, for he just wrapped his big coat 'round him, and slipping on his brogues, left the house. I sat up in the basket and listened till they were gone some minutes; and then, in a costume as light as my parent's, set out after them, to watch the course of the adventure. I thought to take a short cut, and be before them; but by bad luck I fell into a bog hole, and only escaped being drowned by a chance. As it was, when I reached the house, the performance had already begun.

I think I see the whole scene this instant before my eyes, as I sat on a little window with one pane, and that a broken one, and surveyed the proceeding. It was a large room, at one end of which was a bed, and beside it a table, with physic bottles, and spoons, and teacups; a little farther off was another table, at which sat Billy Scanlan, with all manner of writing materials before him. The country people sat two, sometimes three, deep round the walls, all intently eager and anxious for the coming event. Peter himself went from place to place, trying to smother his grief, and occasionally helping the company to whisky—which was supplied with more than accustomed liberality.

All my consciousness of the deceit and trickery could not deprive the scene of a certain solemnity. The misty distance of the half-lighted room; the highly wrought expression of the country people's faces, never more intensely excited than at some moment of this kind; the low, deep-drawn breathings, unbroken save by a sigh or a sob—the tribute of affectionate sorrow to some lost friend, whose memory was thus forcibly brought back: these, I repeat it, were all so real, that, as

I looked, a thrilling sense of awe stole over me, and I actually shook with fear.

A low faint cough, from the dark corner where the bed stood, seemed to cause even a deeper stillness; and then in a silence where the buzzing of a fly would have been heard, my father said: "Where's Billy Scanlan? I want to make my will!"

"He's here, father!" said Peter, taking Billy by the hand and leading him to the bedside.

"Write what I bid ye, Billy, and be quick; for I haven't a long time afore me here. I die a good Catholic, though Father O'Rafferty won't give me the 'rites'!"

A general chorus of muttered "Oh! musha, musha," was now heard through the room; but whether in grief over the sad fate of the dying man, or the unflinching severity of the priest, is hard to say.

"I die in peace with all my neighbours and all mankind!"

Another chorus of the company seemed to approve these charitable expressions.

"I bequeath unto my son, Peter—and never was there a better son, or a decenter boy!—have you that down? I bequeath unto my son, Peter, the whole of my two farms of Killimundoonery and Knocksheboora, with the fallow meadows behind Lynch's house, the forge, and the right of turf on the Dooran bog. I give him, and much good may it do him, Lanty Cassarn's acre, and the Luary field, with the limekiln; and that reminds me that my mouth is just as dry; let me taste what ye have in the jug." Here the dying man took a very hearty pull, and seemed considerably refreshed by it. "Where was I, Billy Scanlan?" says he; "oh, I remember, at the limekiln; I leave him—that's Peter, I mean—the two potato gardens at Noonan's Well; and it is the elegant fine crops grows there."

"Ain't you gettin' wake, father, darlin'?" says Peter, who began to be afraid of my father's loquaciousness; for, to say the truth, the punch got into his head, and he was greatly disposed to talk.

"I am, Peter, my son," says he; "I am getting wake; just touch my lips again with the jug. Ah, Peter, Peter, you watered the drink!"

"No, indeed, father; but it's the taste is lavin' you," says Peter; and again a low chorus of compassionate pity murmured through the cabin.

"Well, I'm nearly done now," says my father: "there's only one little plot of ground remaining; and I put it on you, Peter—as ye wish to live a good man, and die with the same easy heart I do now—that ye mind my last words to ye here. Are ye listening? Are the neighbours listening? Is Billy Scanlan listening?"

"Yes, sir. Yes, father. We're all minding!" chorused the audience.

"Well, then, it's my last will and testament, and may—give me over the jug,"—here he took a long drink—"and may that blessed liquor be poison to me if I'm not as eager about this as every other part of my will; I say, then, I bequeath the little plot at the crossroads to poor Con Cregan; for he has a very heavy charge, and is as honest and as hard-working a man as ever I knew. Be a friend to him, Peter, dear; never let him want while ye have it yourself; think of me on my deathbed whenever he asks ye for any trifle. Is it down, Billy Scanlan? the two acres at the cross to Con Cregan, and his heirs *in secla seclorum*. Ah, blessed be the saints! but I feel my heart lighter after that," says he; "a good work makes an easy conscience; and now I'll drink all the company's good health, and many happy returns——"

What he was going to add, there's no saying; but Peter, who was now terribly frightened at the lively tone the sick man was assuming, hurried all the people away into another room, to let his father die in peace.

When they were all gone, Peter slipped back to my father, who was putting on his brogues in a corner: "Con," says he, "ye did it all well; but sure that was a joke about the two acres at the cross."

"Of course it was, Peter," says he; "sure it was all a joke for the matter of that: won't I make the neighbours laugh hearty to-morrow when I tell them all about it!"

"You wouldn't be mean enough to betray me?" says Peter, trembling with fright.

"Sure ye wouldn't be mean enough to go against yer father's dying words?" says my father; "the last sentence ever he spoke"; and here he gave a low wicked laugh, that made myself shake with fear.

"Very well, Con!" says Peter, holding out his hand; "a bargain's a bargain; ye're a deep fellow, that's all!" and so it ended; and my father slipped quietly home over the bog, mighty well satisfied with the legacy he left himself.

And thus we became the owners of the little spot known to this day as Con's Acre.

SAMUEL WARREN

(1807–1877)

SAMUEL WARREN was a Welsh lawyer, who took silk in 1851, and was Recorder of Hull 1854-74. He published several important law books. His principal work of fiction, *Ten Thousand a Year* (1841), was an unqualified popular success.

"The Thunder-Struck" is reprinted from *Passages in the Diary of a Late Physician* (1832).

THE THUNDER-STRUCK *

IN the summer of 18—, London was visited by one of the most tremendous thunder-storms that have been known in this climate. Its character and effects—some of which latter form the subject of this chapter—will make me remember it to the latest hour of my life.

There was something portentous—a still, surcharged air—about the whole of Tuesday, the 10th of July 18—, as though nature were trembling and cowering beneath a common shock. In the exquisite language of one of our old dramatists, † there seemed

> —A calm
> Before a tempest, when the gentle air
> Lays her soft ear close to the earth, to listen
> For that she fears steals on to ravish her.

From about eleven o'clock at noon, the sky wore a lurid threatening aspect, that shot awe into the beholder; suggesting to startled fancy the notion, that within the dim confines of the "labouring air," mischief was working to the world.

The heat was intolerable, keeping almost everybody within doors. The dogs, and other cattle in the streets, stood everywhere panting and loath to move. There was no small excitement, or rather agitation, diffused throughout the country, especially London; for, strange to say (and many must recollect the circumstance), it had been for some time confidently foretold by certain enthusiasts, religious as well as philosophic, that the earth was to be destroyed that very day; in short, that the tremendous JUDGMENT was at hand! Though not myself over-credulous, or given to superstitious fears, I own that on coupling these fearful predictions with the unusual, and almost preternatural aspect of the day, I more than once experienced sudden qualms of apprehension as I rode along on my daily rounds. I did not so much communicate alarm to the various circles I entered, as catch it from them. Then, again, I would occasionally pass a silent group of passengers clustering round a street-preacher, who, true to his vocation, "redeeming the time," seemed by his gestures, and the disturbed countenances around him, to be foretelling all that was frightful. The tone of excitement which pervaded my feelings, was further heightened by a conversation on the prevailing topic which I had in the course of the morning with

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* This is a narrative—for obvious reasons somewhat varied in circumstances—of a lamentable occurrence in the author's family. About fourteen years ago, a very beautiful girl, eighteen years old, terrified at a violent thunder-storm, rushed into a cellar to escape, as she thought, from the danger, and was found there in the state described in the text. She died four days afterwards.

† Marlowe.

the distinguished poet and scholar, Mr. ——. With what fearful force did he suggest possibilities; what vivid, startling colouring did he throw over them! It was, indeed, a topic congenial to his gloomy imagination. He talked to me, in short, till my disturbed fancy began to realise the wildest chimeras.

"Great God, Dr. ——!" said he, laying his hand suddenly on my arm, his great black eyes gleaming with mysterious awe, "Think, only think! What if, at the moment we are talking together, a comet, whose track the peering eye of science has never traced—whose very existence is known to none but God—is winging its fiery way towards our earth, swift as the lightning, and with force inevitable! Is it at this instant dashing to fragments some mighty orb that obstructed its progress, and then passing on towards us, disturbing system after system in its way?—How—when will the frightful crash be felt? Is its heat now blighting our atmosphere?—Will combustion first commence, or shall we be at once split asunder into innumerable fragments, and sent drifting through infinite space?—Whither—whither shall we fly? what must become of our species?—Is the Scriptural JUDGMENT then coming?—Oh, doctor, what if all these things *are really at hand?*"

Was this imaginative raving calculated to calm one's feelings?—By the time I reached home, late in the afternoon, I felt in a fever of excitement. I found an air of apprehension throughout the whole house. My wife, children, and a young lady, a visitor, were all together in the parlour, looking out for me, through the window, anxiously—and with paler faces than they perhaps were aware of. The visitor just alluded to, by the way, was a Miss Agnes P——, a girl of about twenty-one, the daughter of an old friend and patient of mine. Her mother, a widow (with no other child than this), resided in a village about fifty miles from town—from which she was expected, in a few days' time, to take her daughter back again into the country. Miss P—— was a very charming young woman. There was a softness of expression about her delicate features, that in my opinion constitutes the highest style of feminine loveliness. Her dark, pensive, searching eyes, spoke a soul full of feeling. The tones of her voice, mellow and various, and her whole carriage and demeanour, were in accordance with the expression of her features. In person she was about the average height, and perfectly well moulded and proportioned; and there was a Hebe-like ease and grace about all her gestures. She excelled in most feminine accomplishments; but her favourite objects were music and romance. A more imaginative creature was surely never known. It required all the fond and anxious surveillance of her friends to prevent her carrying her tastes to excess, and becoming, in a manner, unfitted for the "dull commerce of a duller earth!"

No sooner had this young lady made her appearance in my house, and given token of something like a prolonged stay, than I became the most popular man in the circle of my acquaintance. Such assiduous calls to inquire after *my* health, and that of my family!—Such a multitude of men—young ones, to boot—and so embarrassed with a consciousness of the poorness of the pretence that drew them to my house! Such matronly inquiries from mothers and elderly female relatives, into the nature and extent of "sweet Miss P——'s expectations!" During a former stay at my house, about six months before the period of which I am writing, Miss P—— surrendered her affections—to the delighted surprise of all her friends and relatives—to the quietest, and perhaps worthiest of her claimants—a young man, then preparing for orders at Oxford. Never, sure, was there a greater contrast between the tastes of a pledged couple; she all feeling, romance, enthusiasm; he serene, thoughtful, and matter-of-fact. It was most amusing to witness their occasional collisions on subjects which developed their respective tastes and qualities; and interesting to note that the effect was invariably to raise the one in the other's estimation—as if each prized most the qualities of the other. Young N—— had spent two days in London—the greater portion of them, I need hardly say, at my house—about a week before the period of which I am writing; and he and his fair mistress had disputed rather keenly on the topic of general discussion—the predicted event of the 10th of July. If she did not repose implicit faith in the prophecy, her belief had, somehow or another, acquired a most disturbing strength. He laboured hard to disabuse her of her awful apprehensions—and she as hard to overcome his obstinate incredulity. Each was a little too eager about the matter; and, for the first time since they had known each other, they parted with a *little* coldness—yes, although he was to set off the next morning for Oxford! In short, scarcely anything was talked about by Agnes but the coming 10th of July; and if she did not anticipate the actual destruction of the globe, and the final judgment of mankind, she at least looked forward to some event, mysterious and tremendous. The eloquent enthusiastic creature almost brought over my placid, little, matter-of-fact wife to her way of thinking!

To return from this long digression—which, however, will be presently found to have been not unnecessary. After staying a few minutes in the parlour, I retired to my library, for the purpose, among other things, of making those entries in my Diary, from which these "Passages" are taken—but the pen lay useless in my hand. With my chin resting on the palm of my left hand, I sat at my desk lost in a reverie; my eyes fixed on the tree which grew in the yard and overshadowed my windows. How still—how motionless was every leaf! What sultry—oppressive—*unusual* repose! How it would have cheered me to hear the faintest "sough" of wind—to see the breeze sweep freshening through the leaves, rustling and stirring them into life! I opened my window, untied my neckerchief, and loosened my shirt-collar—for I felt suffocated with the heat. I heard at length a faint pattering sound among the leaves of the tree—and presently there fell on the window-frame three or four large ominous drops of rain. After gazing upwards for a moment or two on the gloomy aspect of the sky, I once more settled down to writing; and was dipping my pen into the ink-stand, when there blazed about me a flash of lightning, with such a ghastly, blinding splendour, as defies all description. It was like what one might conceive to be a glimpse of hell—and yet not a *glimpse* merely—for it continued, I think, six or seven seconds. It was followed, at scarce an instant's interval, with a crash of thunder as if the world had been smitten out of its sphere, and was rending asunder!—I hope these expressions will not be considered hyperbolical. No one, I am sure, who recollects the occurrence I am describing, will require the appeal!—May *I* never see or hear the like again! I leaped from my chair with consternation; and could think of nothing at the moment, but closing my eyes, and shutting out from my ears the stunning sound of the thunder. For a moment I stood literally stupefied. On recovering myself, my first impulse was to spring to the door, and rush downstairs in search of my wife and children. I heard, on my way, the sound of shrieking proceed from the parlour in which I had left them. In a moment I had my wife folded in my arms, and my children clinging with screams round my knees. My wife had fainted. While I was endeavouring to restore her, there came a second flash of lightning, equally terrible with the first—and a second explosion of thunder, loud as one could imagine the discharge of a thousand parks of artillery, directly overhead. The windows—in fact, the whole house quivered with the shock. The noise helped to recover my wife from her swoon.

"Kneel down! Love! Husband!" she gasped, endeavouring to drop upon her knees, "Kneel down! Pray—pray for us! *It is at hand!*" After shouting several times pretty loudly, and pulling the bell repeatedly and violently, one of the servants made her appearance—but evidently terrified and bewildered. She and her mistress, however, recovered themselves in a few minutes, roused by the cries of the children. "Wait a moment, love," said I, "and I will bring you a little sal-volatile!" I stepped into the back room, where I generally kept a few phials of drugs—and poured out what I wanted. The thought then for the first time struck me, that I had not seen Miss P—— in the parlour I had just quitted. *Where* was she? What would *she* say to all this?—"God bless me, where is she?" I thought, with increasing trepidation.

"Edward—Edward," I exclaimed, to a servant who happened to pass the door of the room where I was standing; "where's Miss P——?"

"Miss P——, sir!—Why—I don't—oh, yes!" he replied, suddenly recollecting himself, "about five minutes ago I saw her run very quickly upstairs, and haven't seen her since, sir."

"What!" I exclaimed with increasing trepidation, "was it about the time that the first flash of lightning came?" "Yes, it was, sir!"—"Take this in to your mistress, and say I'll be with her immediately," said I, giving him what I had mixed. I rushed upstairs, calling out as I went, "Agnes! Agnes! where are you?" I received no answer. At length I reached the floor where her bedroom lay. The door was closed, but not shut.

"Agnes! Where are you?" I inquired, very agitatedly, at the same time knocking at her door. I received no answer.

"Agnes! Agnes! For God's sake speak!—Speak, or I shall come into your room!" No reply was made; and I thrust open the door. Heavens! Can I describe what I saw?

Within less than a yard of me stood the most fearful figure my eyes have ever beheld. It was Agnes!—She was in the attitude of stepping to the door, with both arms extended. Her hair was partially dishevelled. Her face seemed whiter than the white dress she wore. Her lips were of a livid hue. Her eyes, full of awful expression, were fixed with a petrifying stare on me. Oh, language fails me—utterly!—Those eyes have seldom since been absent from me when alone! I strove to speak—but could not utter a sound. My lips seemed rigid as those I looked at. The horrors of nightmare seemed upon me. My eyes at length closed; my head seemed turning round—and for a moment or two I lost all consciousness. I revived. *There* was the frightful thing still before me—nay, close to me! Though I looked at her, I never once thought of Agnes P——. It was the tremendous appearance—the ineffable terror gleaming from her eyes, that thus overcame me. I protest I cannot conceive anything more dreadful! Miss P—— continued standing perfectly motionless; and while I was gazing at her in the manner I have been describing, a peal of thunder roused me to my self-possession. I stepped towards her, took hold of her hand, exclaiming, "Agnes—Agnes!" and carried her to the bed, where I laid her down. It required some little force to press down her arms; and I drew the eyelids over her staring eyes mechanically. While in the act of doing so, a flash of lightning flickered luridly over her—but her eye neither quivered nor blinked. She seemed to have been suddenly deprived of all sense and motion: in fact, nothing but her pulse—if pulse it should be called—and faint breathing, showed that she lived. My eye wandered over her whole figure, dreading to meet some scorching trace of lightning—but there was nothing of the kind. What had happened to her? Was she frightened—to death? I spoke to her; I called her by her name, loudly; I shook her, rather violently: I might have acted it all to a statue!—I rang the chamber bell with almost frantic violence: and presently my wife and a female servant made their appearance in the room; but I was far more embarrassed than assisted by their presence. "Is she killed?" murmured the former, as she staggered towards the bed, and then clung convulsively to me—"Has the lightning struck her?"

I was compelled to disengage myself from her grasp, and hurry her into the adjoining room—whither I called a servant to attend her; and then returned to my hapless patient. But what was I to do? Medical man as I was, I never had seen a patient in such circumstances, and felt as ignorant on the subject as agitated. It was not epilepsy—it was not apoplexy—a swoon—nor any known species of hysteria. The most remarkable feature of her case, and what enabled me to ascertain the nature of her disease, was this; that if I happened accidentally to alter the position of her limbs, they retained, for a short time, their new position. If, for instance, I moved her arm—it remained for a while in the situation in which I had last placed it, and gradually resumed its former one. If I raised her into an upright posture, she continued sitting so without the support of pillows, or other assistance, as exactly as if she had heard me express a wish to that effect, and assented to it; but—the horrid vacancy of her aspect! If I elevated one eyelid for a moment, to examine the state of the eye, it was some time in closing, unless I drew it over myself. All these circumstances—which terrified the servant who stood shaking at my elbow, and muttering, "She's possessed! she's possessed!—Satan has her!" convinced me at length that the unfortunate girl was seized with CATALEPSY; that rare mysterious affection, so fearfully blending the conditions of life and death—presenting—so to speak—life in the aspect of death, and death in that of life! I felt no doubt that extreme terror, operating suddenly on a nervous system most highly excited, and a vivid, active fancy, had produced the effects I saw. Doubtless the first terrible outbreak of the thunder-storm—especially the fierce splendour of that first flash of lightning which so alarmed myself—apparently corroborating and realising all her awful apprehensions of the predicted event, overpowered her at once, and flung her into the fearful situation in which I found her—that of one ARRESTED in her terror-struck flight towards the door of her chamber. But again—the thought struck me—had she received any direct injury from the lightning? Had it blinded her? It might be so—for I could make no impression on the pupils of the eyes. Nothing could startle them into action. They seemed a little more dilated than usual, and fixed.

I confess that, besides the other agitating circumstances of the moment, this extraordinary, this unprecedented case, too much distracted my self-possession to enable me promptly to deal with it. I had heard and read of, but never before seen such a case. No time, however, was to be lost. I determined to resort at once to strong anti-spasmodic treatment. I bled her from the arm freely, applied blisters behind the ears, immersed her feet, which, together with her hands, were cold as those of a statue, in hot water, and endeavoured to force into her mouth a little opium and ether. Whilst the servants were busied about her, undressing her, and carrying my directions into effect, I stepped for a moment into the adjoining room, where I found my wife just recovering from a violent fit of hysterics. Her loud laughter, though so near me, I had not once heard, so absorbed was I with the mournful case of Miss P——. After continuing with her till she recovered sufficiently to accompany me downstairs, I returned to Miss P——'s bedroom. She continued exactly in the condition in which I had left her. Though the water was hot enough almost to parboil her tender feet, it produced no sensible effect on the circulation, or the state of the skin; and finding a strong determination of blood towards the regions of the head and neck, I determined to have her cupped between the shoulders. I went downstairs to drop a line to the apothecary, requesting him to come immediately with his cupping instruments. As I was delivering the note into the hands of a servant, a man rushed up to the open door where I was standing, and, breathless with haste, begged my instant attendance on a patient close by, who had just met with a severe accident. Relying on the immediate arrival of Mr. ——, the apothecary, I put on my hat and great-coat, took my umbrella, and followed the man who had summoned me out. It rained in torrents; for the storm, after about twenty minutes' intermission, burst forth again with unabated violence. The thunder and lightning—peal upon peal—blaze upon blaze, were really terrific!

The patient who thus abruptly, and, under circumstances, inopportunely, required my services, proved to be one Bill ——, a notorious boxer, who, in returning that evening from a great prize-fight, had been thrown out of his gig, the horse having been frightened by the lightning, and the rider, who was much the worse for liquor, had his ankle dreadfully dislocated. He had been taken up by some passengers, and conveyed with great difficulty to his own residence, a public-house, not three minutes' walk from where I lived. The moment I entered the tap-room, which I had to pass on my way to the staircase, I heard his groans, or rather howls, overhead. The excitement of intoxication, added to the agonies occasioned by his accident, had driven him, I was told, nearly mad. He was uttering the most revolting execrations as I entered his room. He damned himself, his ill luck (for it seemed he had lost considerable sums on the fight), the combatants, the horse that threw him, the thunder and lightning—everything, in short, and everybody about him. The sound of the thunder was sublime melody to me, and the more welcome, because it drowned the blasphemous bellowing of the monster I was visiting. Yes; there lay the burly boxer, stretched upon the bed, with none of his dress removed except the boot, which had been cut from the limb that was injured—his new blue coat, with glaring yellow buttons, and drab knee-breeches, soiled with the street mud into which he had been precipitated—his huge limbs, writhing in restless agony over the bed—his fists clenched, and his flat, iron-featured face swollen and distorted with pain and fury.

"But, my good woman," said I, pausing at the door, addressing myself to the boxer's wife, who, wringing her hands, had conducted me upstairs, "I assure you I am not the person you should have sent to. It's a surgeon's, not a physician's case; I fear I can't do much for him —quite out of my way——"

"Oh, for God's sake—for the love of God, don't say so!" gasped the poor creature with affrighted emphasis—"Oh, do *something* for him, or he'll drive us all out of our senses—he'll be killing us!"

"Do something!" roared my patient, who had overheard the last words of his wife, turning his bloated face towards me—"*do* something, indeed? aye, and be —— to you! Here, here look ye, doctor—look ye *here!*" he continued, pointing to the wounded foot, which, all crushed and displaced, and the stocking soaked with blood, presented a shocking appearance—"look here, indeed!—ah! that —— horse! that —— horse!" his teeth gnashed, and his right hand was lifted up, clenched, with fury—"If I don't break every bone in his —— body, as soon as ever I can stir this cursed leg again!"

I felt for a moment as though I had entered the very pit and presence of Satan, for the lightning was gleaming over his ruffianly figure incessantly, and the thunder rolling close overhead while he was speaking.

"Hush! hush! you'll drive the doctor away! For pity's sake hold your tongue, or Dr. —— won't come into the room to you!" gasped his wife, dropping on her knees beside him.

"Ha, ha! Let him go! Only let him stir a step, and lame as I am, —— me if I don't jump out of bed, and teach him civility! *Here*, you doctor, as you call yourself! What's to be done?" Really I was too much shocked, at the moment, to know. I was half inclined to leave the room immediately, and had a fair plea for doing so in the *surgical* nature of the case; but the agony of the fellow's wife induced me to check my outraged feelings, and stay. After directing a person to be sent off, in my name, for the nearest surgeon, I addressed myself to my task, and proceeded to remove the stocking. His whole body quivered with the anguish it occasioned; and I saw such fury gathering in his features, that I began to dread lest he might rise up in a sudden frenzy, and strike me.

"Oh! oh! oh! Curse your clumsy hands! You don't know no more nor a child!" he groaned, "what you're about. Leave it—leave it alone! Give over with ye! Doctor, ——, I say, be off!"

"Mercy, mercy, doctor!" sobbed his wife in a whisper, fearing from my momentary pause that I was going to take her husband at his word—"Don't go away!—Oh, go on—go on! It *must* be done, you know! Never mind what he says! He's only a little the worse for liquor now—and—and then the *pain!* Go on, doctor! He'll thank you the more for it to-morrow!"

"Wife! here!" shouted her husband. The woman instantly stepped up to him. He stretched out his Herculean arm, and grasped her by the shoulder.

"So, you ——! I'm drunk, am I? I'm *drunk* eh—you lying ——!" he exclaimed, and jerked her violently away, right across the room, to the door, where the poor creature fell down, but presently rose, crying bitterly.

"Get away! Get off—get downstairs—if you don't want me to serve you the same again! Say I'm drunk, you beast?" With frantic gestures she obeyed, rushed downstairs, and I was left alone with her husband. I was disposed to follow her abruptly; but the positive dread of my life (for he might leap out of the bed and kill me with a blow) kept me to my task. My flesh crept with disgust at touching his! I examined the wound, which undoubtedly must have given him torture enough to drive him mad, and bathed it in warm water; resolved to pay no attention to his abuse, and quit the instant that the surgeon, who had been sent for, made his appearance. At length he came. I breathed more freely, resigned the case into his hands, and was going to take up my hat, when he begged me to continue in the room, with such an earnest apprehensive look, that I reluctantly remained. I saw he dreaded as much being left alone with his patient as I! It need hardly be said that every step that was taken in dressing the wound, was attended with the vilest execrations of the patient. Such a foul-mouthed ruffian I never encountered anywhere. It seemed as though he was possessed of a devil. What a contrast to the sweet speechless sufferer whom I had left at home, and to whom my heart yearned to return!

The storm still continued raging. The rain had comparatively ceased, but the thunder and lightning made their appearance with fearful frequency and fierceness. I drew down the blind of the window, observing to the surgeon that the lightning seemed to startle our patient.

"Put it up again! Put up that blind again, I say!" he cried impatiently. "D'ye think *I'm* afeard of the lightning, like my —— horse to-day? Put it up again—or I'll get out and do it myself!" I did as he wished. Reproof or expostulation was useless. "Ha!" he exclaimed, in a low tone of fury, rubbing his hands together—in a manner bathing them in the fiery stream, as a flash of lightning gleamed ruddily over him. "*There* it is! Curse it—just the sort of flash that frightened my horse—d—— it!"—and the impious wretch shook his fist, and "grinned horribly a ghastly smile."

"Be silent, sir! Be silent! or we will both leave you instantly. Your behaviour is impious! it is frightful to witness! Forbear—lest the vengeance of God descend upon you!"

"Come, come—none o' your —— Methodism *here!* Go on with your business! Stick to your trade," interrupted the Boxer.

"Does not that rebuke your blasphemies?" I inquired, suddenly shading my eyes from the vivid stream of lightning that burst into the room, while the thunder rattled overhead—evidently in most dreadful proximity. When I removed my hands from my eyes, and opened them, the first object that they fell upon was the figure of the Boxer, sitting upright in bed, with both hands stretched out, just as those of Elymas the sorcerer in the picture of Raphael—his face the colour of a corpse—and his eyes, almost starting out of their sockets, directed with a horrid stare towards the window. His lips moved not—nor did he utter a sound. It was clear what had occurred. The wrathful fire of heaven, that had glanced harmlessly around us, had blinded the blasphemer. Yes—the sight of his eyes had perished. While we were gazing at him in silent awe, he fell back in bed speechless, and clasped his hands over his breast, seemingly in an attitude of despair. But for that motion, we should have thought him dead. Shocked beyond expression, Mr. —— paused in his operations. I examined the eyes of the patient. The pupils were both dilated to their utmost extent, and immovable. I asked him many questions, but he answered not a word. Occasionally, however, a groan of horror, remorse, agony (or all combined) would burst from his pent bosom; and this was the only evidence he gave of consciousness. He moved over on his right side—his "pale face turned to the wall"—and, unclasping his hands, pressed the forefinger of each with convulsive force upon the eyes. Mr. —— proceeded with his task. What a contrast between the present and past behaviour of our patient! Do what we would—put him to never such great pain—he neither uttered a syllable, nor expressed any symptoms of passion, as before. There was, however, no necessity for my continuing any longer; so I left the case in the hands of Mr. ——, who undertook to acquaint Mrs. —— with the frightful accident that had happened to her husband. What two scenes had I witnessed that evening!

I hurried home full of agitation at the spectacle I had just quitted, and melancholy apprehensions concerning the one to which I was returning. On reaching my lovely patient's room, I found, alas! no sensible effects produced by the very active means which had been adopted. She lay in bed, the aspect of her features apparently the same as when I last saw her. Her eyes were closed—her cheeks very pale, and mouth rather open, as if she were on the point of speaking. The hair hung in a little disorder on each side of her face, having escaped from beneath her cap. My wife sat beside her, grasping her right hand—weeping and almost stupefied; and the servant that was in the room when I entered, seemed so bewildered as to be worse than useless. As it was now getting dark, I ordered candles. I took one of them in my hand, opened her eyelids, and passed and repassed the candle several times before her eyes, but it produced no apparent effect. Neither the eyelids blinked, nor the pupils contracted. I then took out my penknife, and made a thrust with the open blade, as though I intended to plunge it into her right eye; it seemed as if I might have buried the blade in the socket, for the shock or resistance called forth by the attempt. I took her hand in mine—having for a moment displaced my wife—and found it damp and cold; but when I suddenly left it suspended, it continued so for a few moments, and only gradually resumed its former situation. I pressed the back of the blade of my penknife upon the flesh at the root of the nail (as everyone knows, a very tender part), but she evinced not the slightest sensation of pain. I shouted suddenly and loudly in her ears, but with similar ill success. I felt at an extremity. Completely baffled at all points—discouraged and agitated beyond expression—I left Miss P—— in the care of a nurse, whom I had sent for to attend upon her, at the instance of my wife, and hastened to my study to see if my books could throw any light upon the nature of this, to me, new and inscrutable disorder. After hunting about for some time, and finding but little to the purpose, I prepared for bed, determining in the morning to send off for Miss P——'s mother, and Mr. N—— from Oxford, and also to call upon my eminent friend Dr. D——, and hear what his superior skill and experience might be able to suggest. In passing Miss P——'s room, I stepped in to take my farewell for the evening. "Beautiful, unfortunate creature!" thought I, as I stood gazing mournfully on her, with my candle in my hand, leaning against the bed-post. "What mystery is upon thee? What awful change has come over thee?—the gloom of the grave and the light of life—both lying upon thee at once! Is thy mind palsied as thy body? How long is this strange state to last? How long art thou doomed to linger thus on the confines of both worlds, so that those in either, who love thee, may not claim thee? Heaven guide our thoughts to discover a remedy for thy fearful disorder!" I could not bear to look upon her any longer; and after kissing her lips, hurried up to bed, charging the nurse to summon me the moment that any change whatever was perceptible in Miss P——. I dare say, I shall be easily believed when I apprise the reader of the troubled night that followed such a troubled day. The thunder-storm itself, coupled with the predictions of the day, and apart from its attendant incidents that have been mentioned, was calculated to leave an awful and permanent impression on one's mind. "If I were to live a century, I could not forget it," said a distinguished writer, in a letter to me. "The thunder and lightning were more appalling than I ever recollect witnessing, even in the West Indies—that region of storms and hurricanes. The air had been long surcharged with electricity; and I predicted several days beforehand that we should have a storm of very unusual violence. But when with this we couple the strange prophecy that gained credit with a prodigious number of those one would have expected to be above such things—neither more nor less than that the world was to come to an end on that very day, and the judgment of mankind to follow; I say, the coincidence of the events was not a little singular, and calculated to inspire common folk with wonder and fear. I dare say, if one could but find them out, that there were instances of people frightened out of their wits on the occasion. I own to you candidly that I, for one, felt a little squeamish, and had not a little difficulty in bolstering up my courage with Virgil's *Felix qui potuit rerum cognoscere causas,*" etc.

I did not so much sleep as doze interruptedly for the first three or four hours after getting into bed. I, as well as my alarmed Emily, would start up occasionally, and sit listening, under the apprehension that we heard a shriek, or some other such sound, proceed from Miss P——'s room. The image of the blinded Boxer flitted in fearful forms about me, and my ears seemed to ring with his curses.—It must have been, I should think, between two and three o'clock, when I dreamed that I leaped out of bed, under an impulse sudden as irresistible—slipped on my dressing-gown, and hurried downstairs to the back drawing-room. On opening the door, I found the room lit up with funeral tapers, and the apparel of a dead-room spread about. At the further end lay a coffin on trestles, covered with a long sheet, with the figure of an old woman sitting beside it, with long streaming white hair, and her eyes, bright as the lightning, directed towards me with a fiendish stare of exultation. Suddenly she rose up—pulled off the sheet that had covered the coffin—pushed aside the lid—plucked out the body of Miss P——, dashed it on the floor, and trampled upon it with apparent triumph! This horrid dream awoke me, and haunted my waking thoughts. May I never pass such a dismal night again!

I rose from my bed in the morning feverish and unrefreshed; and in a few minutes' time hurried to Miss P——'s room. The mustard applications to the soles of the feet, together with the blisters behind the ears, had produced the usual local effects, without affecting the complaint. Both her pulse and breathing continued calm. The only change perceptible in the colour of her countenance was a slight pallor about the upper part of the cheeks, and I fancied there was an expression about her mouth approaching to a smile. She had, I found, continued, throughout the night, motionless and silent as a corpse. With a profound sigh I took my seat beside her, and examined the eyes narrowly, but perceived no change in them. What was to be done? How was she to be roused from this fearful—if not fatal lethargy?

While I was gazing intently on her features, I fancied that I perceived a slight muscular twitching about the nostrils. I stepped hastily downstairs (just as a drowning man, they say, catches at a straw) and returned with a phial of the strongest solution of ammonia,* which I applied freely with a feather to the interior of the nostrils. This attempt, also, was unsuccessful as the former ones. I cannot describe the feelings with which I witnessed these repeated failures to stimulate her torpid sensibilities into action; and not knowing what to say or do, I returned to dress, with feelings of unutterable despondency. While dressing, it struck me that a blister might be applied with success along the whole course of the spine. The more I thought of this expedient, the more feasible it appeared; it would be such a direct and powerful appeal to the nervous system—in all probability the very seat and source of the disorder! I ordered one to be sent for instantly—and myself applied it, before I went down to breakfast. As soon as I had dispatched the few morning patients that called, I wrote imperatively to Mr. N—— at Oxford, and to Miss P——'s mother, entreating them by all the love they bore Agnes to come to her instantly. I then set out for Dr. D——'s, whom I found just starting on his daily visits. I communicated the whole case to him. He listened with interest to my statement, and told me he had once a similar case in his own practice, which, alas! terminated fatally, in spite of the most anxious and combined efforts of the *élite* of the faculty in London. He approved of the course I had adopted—most especially the blister on the spine; and earnestly recommended me to resort to galvanism—if Miss P—— should not be relieved from the fit before the evening—when he promised to call, and assist in carrying into effect what he recommended.

"Is it that beautiful girl I saw in your pew last Sunday, at church?" he inquired suddenly.

"The same—the same!" I replied with a sigh.

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* Liquid smelling-salts.

Dr. D—— continued silent for a moment or two.

"Poor creature!" he exclaimed with an air of deep concern, "one so beautiful! Do you know I thought I now and then perceived a very remarkable expression in her eye, especially while that fine voluntary was playing. Is she an enthusiast about music?"

"Passionately—devotedly—"

"We'll try it!" he replied briskly, with a confident air—"We'll try it! First, let us disturb the nervous torpor with a slight shock of galvanism, and then try the effect of your organ." * I listened to the suggestion with interest, but was not quite so sanguine in my expectations as my friend appeared to be.

In the whole range of disorders that affect the human frame, there is perhaps not one so mysterious, so incapable of management, as that which afflicted the truly unfortunate young lady whose case I am narrating. It has given rise to infinite speculation, and is admitted, I believe, on all hands to be—if I may so speak—a nosological anomaly. Van Swieten vividly and picturesquely enough compares it to that condition of the body, which, according to ancient fiction, was produced in the beholder by the appalling sight of Medusa's head—

"Saxifici Medusæ vultus."

The medical writers of antiquity have left evidence of the existence of this disease in their day—but given the most obscure and unsatisfactory descriptions of it, confounding it, in many instances, with other disorders—apoplexy, epilepsy, and swooning. Celsus, according to Van Swieten, describes such patients as these in question under the term "*attoniti*," which is a translation of the title I have prefixed to this paper: while, in our own day, the celebrated Dr. Cullen classes it as a species of apoplexy, at the same time stating that he had never seen a genuine instance of catalepsy. He had always found, he says, those cases, which were reported such, to be feigned ones. More modern science, however, distinctly recognises the disease as one peculiar and independent; and is borne out by numerous unquestionable cases of catalepsy, recorded by some of the most eminent members of the profession. Dr. Jebb, in particular, in the appendix to his "Select Cases of Paralysis of the Lower Extremities," relates a remarkable and affecting instance of a cataleptic patient. As it is not likely that general readers have met with this interesting case, I shall here transcribe it. The young lady who was the subject of the disorder, was seized with the fit when Dr. Jebb was announced on his first visit.

"She was employed in netting, and was passing the needle through the mesh; in which position she immediately became rigid, exhibiting, in a very pleasing form, a figure of deathlike sleep, beyond the power of art to imitate, or the imagination to conceive. Her forehead was serene, her features perfectly composed. The paleness of her colour—her breathing being also scarcely perceptible at a distance—operated in rendering the similitude to marble more exact and striking. The position of the fingers, hands, and arms was altered with difficulty, but preserved every form of flexure they acquired. Nor were the muscles of the neck exempted from this law; her head maintained every situation in which the hand could place it, as firmly as her limbs.

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* I had at home—being myself a lover, thought not a scientific one, of music—a very fine organ.

"Upon gently raising the eyelids, they immediately closed with a degree of spasm.* The iris contracted upon the approach of a candle, as in a state of vigilance. The eyeball itself was slightly agitated with a tremulous motion, not discernible when the eyelid had descended. About half an hour after my arrival, the rigidity of her limbs and statue-like appearance being yet unaltered, she sung three plaintive songs in a tone of voice so elegantly expressive, and with such affecting modulation, as evidently pointed out how much the most powerful passion of the mind was concerned in the production of her disorder—as, indeed, her history confirmed. In a few minutes afterwards she sighed deeply, and the spasm in her limbs was immediately relaxed. She complained that she could not open her eyes, her hands grew cold, a general tremor followed; but in a few seconds, recovering entirely her recollection and powers of motion, she entered into a detail of her symptoms, and the history of her complaint. After she had discoursed for some time with apparent calmness, the universal spasm suddenly returned. The features now assumed a different form, denoting a mind strongly impressed with anxiety and apprehension. At times she uttered short and vehement exclamations, in a piercing tone of voice, expressive of the passions that agitated her mind; her hands being strongly locked in each other, and all her muscles, those subservient to speech excepted, being affected with the same rigidity as before."

But the most extraordinary case on record is one† given by Dr. Petetin, a physician of Lyons, in which "*the senses were transferred to the pit of the stomach, and the ends of the fingers and toes—i.e.* the patients, in a state of insensibility to all external impressions upon the proper organs of sense, were nevertheless capable of hearing, *seeing*, smelling, and tasting whatever was approached to the pit of the stomach, or the ends of the fingers and toes! The patients are said to have answered questions proposed to the pit of the stomach—to have told the hour by a watch placed there—to have tasted food, and smelt the fragrance of apricots, touching the part," etc., etc. It may be interesting to add, that an eminent physician, who went to see the patient, incredulous of what he had heard, returned perfectly convinced of its truth. I have also read somewhere of a Spanish monk, who was so terrified by a sudden sight which he encountered in the Asturias mountains, that, when several of his holy brethren, whom he had preceded a mile or two, came up, they found him stretched upon the ground in the fearful condition of a cataleptic patient. They carried him back immediately to their monastery, and he was believed dead. He suddenly revived, however, in the midst of his funeral obsequies, to the consternation of all around him. When he had perfectly recovered the use of his faculties, he related some absurd matters which he pretended to have seen in a vision during his comatose state. The disorder in question, however, generally makes its appearance in the female sex, and seems to be in many, if not in most instances, a remote member of the family of hysterical affections.—To return, however.

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* This was not the case with Miss P——. I repeatedly remarked the perfect mobility of her eyelids.

† A second similar case, well authenticated, occurred not long afterwards, at the same place.—They are attributed by Dr. P. to the influence of animal electricity.

On returning home from my daily round, in which my dejected air was remarked by all the patients I had visited, I found no alteration whatever in Miss P——. The nurse had failed in forcing even arrowroot down her mouth, and, finding it was not swallowed, was compelled to desist, for fear of choking her. We were, therefore, obliged to resort to other means of conveying support to her exhausted frame. The blister on the spine, from which I had expected so much, and the renewed sinapisms to the feet, had failed to make any impression! Thus was every successive attempt an utter failure! The disorder continued absolutely inaccessible to the approaches of medicine. The baffled attendants could but look at her, and lament. Good God! was Agnes to continue in this dreadful condition till her energies sunk in death? What would become of her lover?—of her mother? These considerations greatly disturbed my peace of mind. I could neither think, read, eat, nor remain anywhere but in the chamber, where, alas! my presence was so unavailing!

Dr. D—— made his appearance soon after dinner; and we proceeded at once to the room where our patient lay. Though a little paler than before, her features were placid as those of the chiselled marble. Notwithstanding all she had suffered, and the fearful situation in which she lay at that moment, she still looked very beautiful. Her cap was off, and her rich auburn hair lay negligently on each side of her, upon the pillow. Her forehead was white as alabaster. She lay with her head turned a little on one side, and her two small white hands were clasped together over her bosom. This was the nurse's arrangement: for "poor dear young lady," she said, "I couldn't bear to see her laid straight along, with her arms close beside her like a corpse, so I tried to make her look as much asleep as possible!" The impression of beauty, however, conveyed by her symmetrical and tranquil features, was disturbed as soon as, lifting up the eyelids, we saw the fixed stare of the eyes. They were not glassy, or corpse-like, but bright as those of life, with a little of the dreadful expression of epilepsy. We raised her in bed, and she, as before, sat upright, but with a blank, absent aspect, that was lamentable and unnatural. Her arms, when lifted and left suspended, did not fall, but *sunk* down again gradually. We returned her gently to her recumbent posture, and determined at once to try the effect of galvanism upon her. My machine was soon brought into the room; and when we had duly arranged matters, we directed the nurse to quit the chamber for a short time, as the effect of galvanism is generally found too startling to be witnessed by a female spectator. I wish I had not myself seen it in the case of Miss P——! Her colour went and came—her eyelids and mouth started open—and she stared wildly about her, with the aspect of one starting out of bed in a fright. I thought at one moment that the horrid spell was broken, for she sat up suddenly, leaned forwards towards me, and her mouth opened as though she were about to speak!

"Agnes! Agnes! dear Agnes! Speak, speak! but a word! Say you live!" I exclaimed, rushing forwards. Alas! she heard me—she saw me—not, but fell back in bed in her former state! When the galvanic shock was conveyed to her limbs, it produced the usual effects—dreadful to behold in all cases—but agonising to me in the case of Miss P——. The last subject on which I had seen the effects of galvanism,* previous to the present instance, was the body of an executed malefactor; and the associations revived on the present occasion were almost too painful to bear. I begged my friend to desist, for I saw the attempt was hopeless, and I would not allow her tender frame to be agitated to no purpose. My mind misgave me for ever making the attempt. What, thought I, if we have fatally disturbed the nervous system, and prostrated the small remains of strength she had left? While I was torturing myself with such fears as these, Dr. —— laid down the rod, with a melancholy air, exclaiming, "Well! what *is* to be done now? I cannot tell you how sanguine I was about the success of this experiment!—Do you know whether she ever had a fit of epilepsy?" he inquired.

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* A word about that case, by the way, in passing. The spectacle was truly horrific. When I entered the room where the experiments were to take place, the body of a man named Carter, which had been cut down from the gallows scarce half an hour, was lying on the table; and the cap being removed, his features, distorted with the agonies of suffocation, were visible. The crime he had been hanged for was murder; and a brawny, desperate ruffian he looked. None of his clothes were removed. He wore a fustian jacket and drab knee-breeches. The first time that the galvanic shock was conveyed to him will never, I dare say, be forgotten by any one present. We all shrunk from the table in consternation, with the momentary belief that we had positively brought the man back to life; for he suddenly sprang up into a sitting posture—his arms waved wildly—the colour rushed into his cheeks—his lips were drawn apart, so as to show all his teeth—and his eyes glared at us with apparent fury. One young man, a medical student, shrieked violently, and was carried out in a swoon. One gentleman present, who happened to be nearest to the upper part of the body, was almost knocked down with the violent blow he received from the left arm. It was some time before any of us could recover presence of mind sufficient to proceed with the experiments.

"No—not that I am aware of. I never heard of it, if she had."

"Had she generally a horror of thunder and lightning?"

"Oh—quite the contrary! she felt a sort of ecstasy on such occasions, and has written some beautiful verses during their continuance. *Such* seemed rather her hour of inspiration than otherwise!"

"Do you think the lightning itself has affected her?—Do you think her sight is destroyed?"

"I have no means of knowing whether the immobility of the pupils arises from blindness, or is only one of the temporary effects of catalepsy."

"Then she believed the prophecy, you think, of the world's destruction on Tuesday?"

"No—I don't think she exactly *believed* it; but I am sure that day brought with it awful apprehensions, or, at least, a fearful degree of uncertainty."

"Well—between ourselves, ——, there was something *very* strange in the coincidence, was not there? Nothing in life ever shook my firmness as it was shaken yesterday! I almost fancied the earth was quivering in its sphere!"

"It *was* a dreadful day!—One I shall never forget! *That* is the image of it," I exclaimed, pointing to the poor sufferer—"which will be engraven on my mind as long as I live! But the worst is perhaps yet to be told you: Mr. N——, her lover, to whom she was very soon to have been married, HE will be here shortly to see her——"

"My God!" exclaimed Dr. D——, clasping his hands, eyeing Miss P—— with intense commiseration—"What a fearful bride for him!"

"I dread his coming—I know not what we shall do! And then there's her *mother*, poor old lady!—her I have written to, and expect almost hourly."

"Why, what an accumulation of shocks and miseries!—it will be upsetting *you!*" said my friend, seeing my distressed appearance.

"Well," he continued, "I cannot now stay here longer—your misery is catching; and, besides, I am most pressingly engaged; but you may rely on my services, if you should require them in any way."

My friend took his departure, leaving me more disconsolate than ever. Before retiring to bed, I rubbed in mustard upon the chief surfaces of the body, hoping, though faintly, that it might have some effect in rousing the system. I kneeled down, before stepping into bed, and earnestly prayed, that as all human efforts seemed baffled, the Almighty would set her free from the mortal thraldom in which she lay, and restore her to life, and those who loved her more than life! Morning came—it found me by her bedside as usual, and her in no wise altered, apparently neither better nor worse! If the unvarying monotony of my description should fatigue the reader, what must the actual monotony and hopelessness have been to me!

While I was sitting beside Miss P——, I heard my youngest boy come downstairs, and ask to be let into the room. He was a little fair-haired youngster, about three years of age, and had always been an especial favourite of Miss P——'s—her "own sweet pet"—as the poor girl herself called him. Determined to throw no chance away, I beckoned him in, and took him on my knee. He called to Miss P——, as if he thought her asleep; patted her face with his little hands, and kissed her. "Wake, wake!—Cousin Aggy, get up!" he cried—"Papa say 'tis time to get up! Do you sleep with eyes open?*—Eh?—Cousin Aggy?" He looked at her intently for some moments, and seemed frightened. He turned pale, and struggled to get off my knee. I allowed him to go, and he ran to his mother, who was standing at the foot of the bed, and hid his face behind her.

I passed breakfast-time in great apprehension, expecting the two arrivals I have mentioned. I knew not how to prepare either the mother or the betrothed husband for the scene that awaited them, and which I had not particularly described to them. It was with no little trepidation that I heard the startling knock of the general postman; and with infinite astonishment and doubt that I took out of the servant's hands a letter from Mr. N—— for poor Agnes! For a while I knew not what to make of it. Had he received the alarming express I had forwarded to him; and did he write to Miss P——? Or was he unexpectedly absent from Oxford when it arrived? The latter supposition was corroborated by the post-mark, which I observed was Lincoln. I felt it my duty to open the letter. Alas! it was in a gay strain—unusually gay for N——; informing Agnes that he had been suddenly summoned into Lincolnshire, to his cousin's wedding, where he was very happy, both on account of his relative's happiness, and the anticipation of a similar scene being in store for himself! Every line was buoyant with hope and animation; but the postscript most affected me.

"P.S.—*The tenth of July*, by the way, my Agnes! *Is* it all over with us, sweet Pythonissa? Are you and I at this moment on separate fragments of the globe? I shall seal my conquest over you with a kiss when I see you! Remember, you parted from me in a pet, naughty one!—and kissed me rather coldly! But that is the way that your sex always end arguments, when you are vanquished!"

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* I had been examining her eyes, and had only half closed the lids.

I read these lines in silence;—my wife burst into tears. I hastened to send a second summons to Mr. N——, and directed it to him in Lincoln, where he had requested Miss P—— to address him. Without explaining the precise nature of Miss P——'s seizure, I gave him warning that he must hurry up to town instantly; and that, even then, it was doubtful whether he would see her alive. After this little occurrence, I could hardly trust myself to go upstairs again, and look upon the unfortunate girl. My heart fluttered at the door, and when I entered I burst into tears. I could utter no more than the words, "poor—poor Agnes!" and withdrew.

I was shocked, and indeed enraged, to find, in one of the morning papers, a paragraph stating, though inaccurately, the nature of Miss P——'s illness. Who could have been so unfeeling as to make the poor girl an object of public wonder and pity? I never ascertained, though I made every inquiry, from whom the intelligence was communicated.

One of my patients that day happened to be a niece of the venerable and honoured Dean of ——, at whose house she resided. He was in the room when I called; and to explain what he called "the gloom of my manner," I gave him a full account of the melancholy event which had occurred. He listened to me till the tears ran down his face.

"But you have not yet tried the effect of *music*—of which you say she is so fond! Do not you intend to resort to it?" I told him it was our intention, and that our agitation was the only reason why we did not try the effect of it immediately after the galvanism.

"Now, doctor, excuse an old clergyman, will you?" said the venerable and pious dean, laying his hand on my arm; "and let me suggest that the experiment may not be the less successful, with the blessing of God, if it be introduced in the course of a religious service. Come, doctor, what say you?" I paused.

"Have you any objection to my calling at your house this evening, and reading the service appointed by our church for the visitation of the sick? It will not be difficult to introduce the most solemn and affecting strains of music, or to let it precede or follow." Still I hesitated—and yet I scarce knew why. "Come, doctor, you know I am no enthusiast—I am not generally considered a fanatic. Surely when man has done his best, and fails, he should not hesitate to turn to God!" The good old man's words sunk into my soul, and diffused in it a cheerful and humble hope that the blessing of Providence would attend the means suggested. I acquiesced in the dean's proposal with delight, and even eagerness; and it was arranged that he should be at my house between seven and eight o'clock that evening. I think I have already observed, that I had an organ, a very fine and powerful one, in my back drawing-room; and this instrument had been the eminent delight of poor Miss P——. She would sit down at it for hours together, and her performance would not have disgraced a professor. I hoped that on the eventful occasion that was approaching, the tones of her favourite instrument, with the blessing of Heaven, might rouse a slumbering responsive chord in her bosom, and aid in dispelling the cruel "charm that deadened her." She certainly could not last long in the condition in which she now lay. Everything that medicine could do, had been tried—in vain; and if the evening's experiment—our forlorn hope, failed—we must, though with a bleeding heart, submit to the will of Providence, and resign her to the grave. I looked forward with intense anxiety—with alternate hope and fear—to the engagement of the evening.

On returning home, late in the afternoon, I found poor Mrs. P—— had arrived in town, in obedience to my summons; and heart-breaking, I learnt, was her first interview, if such it may be called, with her daughter. Her groans and cries alarmed the whole house, and even arrested the attention of the neighbours. I had left instructions, that in case of her arrival during my absence, she should be shown at once, without any precautions, into the presence of Miss P——; with the hope, faint though it was, that the abruptness of her appearance, and the violence of her grief might operate as a salutary shock upon the stagnant energies of her daughter. "My child! my child! my child!" she exclaimed, rushing up to the bed with frantic haste, and clasping the insensible form of her daughter in her arms, where she held her till she fell fainting into those of my wife. What a dread contrast was there between the frantic gestures—the passionate lamentations of the mother, and the stony silence and motionlessness of the daughter! One little but affecting incident occurred in my presence. Mrs. P—— (as yet unacquainted with the peculiar nature of her daughter's seizure) had snatched Miss P——'s hand to her lips, kissed it repeatedly, and suddenly let it go, to press her own hand upon her head, as if to repress a rising hysterical feeling. Miss P——'s arm, as usual, remained for a moment or two suspended, and only gradually sunk down upon the bed. It looked as if she voluntarily continued it in that position, with a cautioning air. Methinks I see at this moment the affrighted stare with which Mrs. P—— regarded the outstretched arm, her body recoiling from the bed, as though she expected her daughter were about to do or appear something dreadful! I subsequently learned from Mrs. P—— that her mother, the grandmother of Agnes, was reported to have been twice affected in a similar manner, though apparently from a different cause; so that there seemed something like a hereditary tendency towards it, even though Mrs. P—— herself had never experienced anything of the kind.

As the memorable evening advanced, the agitation of all who were acquainted with, or interested in the approaching ceremony, increased. Mrs. P——, I need hardly say, embraced the proposal with thankful eagerness. About half-past seven, my friend Dr. D—— arrived, pursuant to his promise; and he was soon afterwards followed by the organist of the neighbouring church—an old acquaintance, and who was a constant visitor at my house, for the purpose of performing and giving instructions on the organ. I requested him to commence playing Martin Luther's hymn—the favourite one of Agnes—as soon as she should be brought into the room. About eight o'clock, the dean's carriage drew up. I met him at the door.

"Peace be to this house, and to all that dwell in it!" he exclaimed as soon as he entered. I led him upstairs; and, without uttering a word, he took the seat prepared for him, before a table on which lay a Bible and Prayer-Book. After a moment's pause, he directed the sick person to be brought into the room. I stepped upstairs, where I found my wife, with the nurse, had finished dressing Miss P——. I thought her paler than usual, and that her cheeks seemed hollower than when I had last seen her. There was an air of melancholy sweetness and languor about her, that inspired the beholder with the keenest sympathy. With a sigh, I gathered her slight form into my arms, a shawl was thrown over her, and, followed by my wife and the nurse, who supported Mrs. P——, I carried her downstairs, and placed her in an easy recumbent posture, in a large old family chair, which stood between the organ and the dean's table. How strange and mournful was her appearance! Her luxuriant hair was gathered up beneath a cap, the whiteness of which was equalled by that of her countenance. Her eyes were closed; and this, added to the paleness of her features, her perfect passiveness, and her being enveloped in a long white unruffled morning dress, which appeared not unlike a shroud at first sight—made her look rather a corpse than a living being! As soon as Dr. D—— and I had taken seats on each side of our poor patient, the solemn strains of the organ commenced. I never appreciated music, and especially the sublime hymn of Luther, so much as on that occasion. My eyes were fixed with agonising scrutiny on Miss P——. Bar after bar of the music melted on the ear, and thrilled upon the heart; but, alas! produced no more effect upon the placid sufferer than the pealing of an abbey organ on the statues around! My heart began to misgive me: if *this* one last experiment failed! When the music ceased, we all kneeled down, and the dean, in a solemn tone of voice, commenced reading appropriate passages from the service for the visitation of the sick. When he had concluded the 71st Psalm, he approached the chair of Miss P——, dropped upon one knee, held her right hand in his, and in a somewhat tremulous voice, read the following affecting verses from the 8th chapter of St. Luke:

"While he yet spake, there cometh one from the ruler of the synagogue's house, saying to him, Thy daughter is dead; trouble not the master.

"But when Jesus heard it, he answered him, saying, Fear not; believe only, and she shall be made whole.

"And when he came into the house, he suffered no man to go in, save Peter, and James, and John, and the father and the mother of the maiden. And all wept and bewailed her: but he said, Weep not; she is not dead, but sleepeth. And they laughed him to scorn, knowing that she was dead.

"And he put them all out, and took her by the hand, and called, saying, *Maid, arise. And her spirit came again, and she arose straightway.*"

While he was reading the passage which I have marked in italics, my heated fancy almost persuaded me that I saw the eyelids of Miss P—— moving. I trembled from head to foot; but, alas! it was a delusion.

The dean, much affected, was proceeding with the fifty-fifth verse, when such a tremendous and long-continued knocking was heard at the street door as seemed likely to break it open. Everyone started up from their knees, as if electrified—all moved but unhappy Agnes—and stood in silent agitation and astonishment. Still the knocking was continued, almost without intermission. My heart suddenly misgave me as to the cause.

"Go—go—see if"—stammered my wife, pale as ashes—endeavouring to prop up the drooping mother of our patient. Before anyone had stirred from the spot on which he was standing, the door was burst open, and in rushed Mr. N——, wild in his aspect, frantic in his gesture, and his dress covered with dust from head to foot. We stood gazing at him as though his appearance had petrified us.

"Agnes!—my Agnes!" he exclaimed, as if choked for want of breath.

"AGNES!—Come!" he gasped, while a smile appeared on his face that had a gleam of madness in it.

"Mr. N——! what are you about? For mercy's sake, be calm! Let me lead you, for a moment, into another room, and all shall be explained!" said I, approaching and grasping him firmly by the arm.

"AGNES!" he continued in a tone that made us tremble. He moved towards the chair in which Miss P—— lay. I endeavoured to interpose but he thrust me aside. The venerable dean attempted to dissuade him, but met with no better a reception than myself.

"Agnes!" he reiterated in a hoarse whisper, "why won't you speak to me? what are they doing to you?" He stepped within a foot of the chair where she lay—calm and immovable as death! We stood by watching his movements, in terrified apprehension and uncertainty. He dropped his hat, which he had been grasping with convulsive force, and before anyone could prevent him, or even suspect what he was about, he snatched Miss P—— out of the chair, and compressed her in his arms with frantic force, while a delirious laugh burst from his lips. We rushed forward to extricate her from his grasp. His arms gradually relaxed—he muttered, "Music! music! a dance!" and almost at the moment that we removed Miss P—— from him, fell senseless into the arms of the organist. Mrs. P—— had fainted; my wife seemed on the verge of hysterics; and the nurse was crying violently. Such a scene of trouble and terror I have seldom witnessed! I hurried with the poor unconscious girl upstairs, laid her upon the bed, shut and bolted the door after me, and hardly expected to find her alive: her pulse, however, was calm as it had been throughout the seizure. The calm of the Dead Sea seemed upon her!

I feel, however, that I should not protract these painful scenes; and shall therefore hurry to their close. The first letter which I had dispatched to Oxford after Mr. N——, happened to bear on the outside the words, "*special haste!*" which procured its being forwarded by express after Mr. N——. The consternation with which he received and read it may be imagined. He set off for town that instant in a post-chaise and four; but finding their speed insufficient, he took to horseback for the last fifty miles, and rode at a rate which nearly destroyed both horse and rider. Hence his sudden appearance at my house, and the frenzy of his behaviour! After Miss P—— had been carried upstairs, it was thought imprudent for Mr. N—— to continue at my house, as he exhibited every symptom of incipient brain fever, and might prove wild and unmanageable. He was therefore removed at once to a house within a few doors off, which was let out in furnished lodgings. Dr. D—— accompanied him, and bled him immediately, very copiously. I have no doubt that Mr. N—— owed his life to that timely measure. He was placed in bed, and put at once under the most vigorous antiphlogistic treatment.

The next evening beheld Dr. D——, the Dean of ——, and myself around the bedside of Agnes. All of us expressed the most gloomy apprehensions. The dean had been offering up a devout and most affecting prayer.

"Well, my friend," said he to me, "she is in the hands of God. All that man can do has been done; let us resign ourselves to the will of Providence!"

"Ay, nothing but a miracle can save her, I fear," replied Dr. D——.

"How much longer do you think it probable, humanly speaking, that the system can continue in this state, so as to give hopes of ultimate recovery?" inquired the dean.

"I cannot say," I replied with a sigh. "She *must* sink, and speedily. She has not received, since she was first seized, as much nourishment as would serve for an infant's meal!"

"I have an impression that she will die suddenly," said Dr. D——; "possibly within the next twelve hours; for I cannot understand how her energies can recover from, or bear longer, this fearful paralysis!"

"Alas, I fear so too!"

"I have heard some frightful instances of premature burial in cases like this," said the Dean. "I hope you will not think of committing her remains to the earth, before you are satisfied, beyond a doubt, that life is extinct." I made no reply—my emotions nearly choked me—I could not bear to contemplate such an event.

"Do you know," said Dr. D——, with an apprehensive air, "I have been thinking latterly of the awful possibility, that, notwithstanding the stagnation of her physical powers, her MIND may be sound, and perfectly conscious of all that has transpired about her!"

"Why—why," stammered the Dean, turning pale—"what if she has—has heard all that has been said!" *

"Aye!" replied Dr. D——, unconsciously sinking his voice to a whisper, "I know of a case—in fact, a friend of mine has just published it—in which a woman—" There was a faint knocking at the door, and I stepped to it, for the purpose of inquiring what was wanted. While I was in the act of closing it again, I overheard Dr. D——'s voice exclaim in an affrighted tone, "Great God!" and on turning round, I saw the Dean moving from the bed, his face white as ashes, and he fell from his chair as if in a fit. How shall I describe what I saw on approaching the bed?

The moment before I had left Miss P—— lying in her usual position, and with her eyes closed. They were now wide open, and staring upwards with an expression I have no language to describe. It reminded me of what I had seen when I first discovered her in the fit. Blood, too, was streaming from her nostrils and mouth—in short, a more frightful spectacle I never witnessed. In a moment, both Dr. D—— and I seemed to have lost all power of motion. Here, then, was the spell broken! The trance over!—I implored Dr. D—— to recollect himself, and conduct the Dean from the room, while I would attend to Miss P——. The nurse was instantly at my side, but violently agitated. She quickly procured warm water, sponges, cloths, etc., with which she at once wiped away and encouraged the bleeding. The first sound uttered by Miss P—— was a long deep-drawn sigh, which seemed to relieve her bosom of an intolerable sense of oppression. Her eyes gradually closed again, and she moved her head away, at the same time raising her trembling right hand to her face. Again she sighed—again opened her eyes, and, to my delight, their expression was more natural than before. She looked languidly about her for a moment, as if examining the bed-curtains—and her eyes closed again. I sent for some weak brandy-and-water, and gave her a little in a teaspoon. She swallowed it with great difficulty. I ordered some warm water to be got ready for her feet, to equalise the circulation; and while it was preparing, sat by her watching every motion of her features with the most eager anxiety. "How are you, Agnes?" I whispered. She turned languidly towards me, opened her eyes, and shook her head feebly—but gave me no answer.

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* In almost every known instance of recovery from catalepsy, the patients have declared that they heard every word that had been uttered beside them!

"Do you feel pain anywhere?" I inquired. A faint smile stole about her mouth, but she did not utter a syllable. Sensible that her exhausted condition required repose, I determined not to tax her newly-recovered energies; so I ordered her a gentle composing draught and left her in the care of the nurse, promising to return by and by, to see how my sweet patient went on. I found that the Dean had left. After swallowing a little wine and water, he recovered sufficiently from the shock he had received, to be able, with Dr. D——'s assistance, to step into his carriage, leaving his solemn benediction for Miss P——.

As it was growing late, I sent my wife to bed, and ordered coffee in my study, whither I retired, and sat lost in conjecture and reverie till nearly one o'clock. I then repaired to my patient's room; but my entrance startled her from a sleep that had lasted almost since I had left. As soon as I sat down by her, she opened her eyes—and my heart leaped with joy to see their increasing calmness—their expression resembling what had oft delighted me while she was in health. After eyeing me steadily for a few moments, she seemed suddenly to recognise me. "Dr. ——!" she whispered, in the faintest possible whisper, while a smile stole over her languid features. I gently grasped her hand; and in doing so my tears fell upon her cheek.

"How strange!" she whispered again in a tone as feeble as before. She gently moved her hand into mine, and I clasped the trembling lilied fingers, with an emotion I cannot express. She noticed my agitation; and the tears came into her eyes, while her lip quivered, as though she were going to speak. I implored her, however, not to utter a word, till she was better able to do it without exhaustion; and, lest my presence should tempt her beyond her strength, I bade her good-night—her poor slender fingers once more compressed mine—and I left her to the care of the nurse, with a whispered injunction to step to me instantly if any change took place in Agnes. I could not sleep!

I felt a prodigious burden removed from my mind; and woke my wife that she might share in my joy.

I received no summons during the night; and on entering her room about nine o'clock in the morning, I found that Miss P—— had taken a little arrow-root in the course of the night, and slept calmly, with but few intervals. She had sighed frequently; and once or twice conversed for a short time with the nurse about *Heaven*—as I understood. She was much stronger than I had expected to find her. I welcomed her affectionately, and she asked me how I was—in a tone that surprised me by its strength and firmness.

"Is the storm over?" she inquired, looking towards the window.

"Oh, yes—long, long ago!" I replied, seeing at once that she seemed to have no consciousness of the interval that had elapsed.

"And are you all well?—Mrs. —— [my wife], how is she?"

"You shall see her shortly."

"Then no one was hurt?"

"Not a hair of our heads!"

"How frightened I must have been!"

"Poh, poh, Agnes! Nonsense! Forget it!"

"Then—the world is not—there has been no—is all the same as it was?" she murmured, eyeing me apprehensively.

"The world come to an end—do you mean?" She nodded, with a disturbed air. "Oh, no, no! It was merely a thunder-storm."

"And is it quite over, and gone?"

"Long ago! Do you feel hungry?" I inquired, hoping to direct her thoughts from a topic I saw agitated her.

"Did you ever see such lightning?" she asked, without regarding my question.

"Why—certainly it was very alarming——"

"Yes, it was! Do you know, doctor," she continued, with a mysterious air—"I—I—saw—yes—there were strange faces in the lightning——"

"Come, child, you rave!"

"—They seemed coming towards the world."

Her voice trembled, the colour of her face changed.

"Well—if you *will* talk such nonsense, Agnes, I must leave you. I will go and fetch my wife. Would you like to see her?"

"*Tell N—— to come to me to-day*—I must see HIM. I have a message for him!" She said this with a sudden energy that surprised me, while her eye brightened as it settled on me. Her last words surprised and disturbed me. Were her intellects affected! How did she know—how could she conjecture that he was within reach? I took an opportunity of asking the nurse whether she had mentioned Mr. N——'s name to her; but not a syllable had been interchanged upon the subject.

Before setting out on my daily visits, I stepped into her room, to take my leave. I was quitting the room, when, happening to look back, I saw her beckoning to me. I returned.

"I MUST see N—— this evening!" said she, with a solemn emphasis that startled me; and as soon as she had uttered the words, she turned her head from me, as if she wished no more to be said.

My first visit was to Mr. N——, whom I found in a very weak state, but so much recovered from his illness as to be sitting up, and partially dressed. He was perfectly calm and collected; and, in answer to his earnest inquiries, I gave him a full account of the nature of Miss P——'s illness. He received the intelligence of the favourable change that had occurred with evident though silent ecstasy. After much inward doubt and hesitation, I thought I might venture to tell him of the parting—the twice-repeated request she had made. The intelligence blanched his already pallid cheeks to a whiter hue, and he trembled violently.

"Did you tell her I was in town? Did she recollect me?"

"No one has breathed your name to her!" I replied.

"Well, doctor, if, on the whole, you think so—that it would be safe," said N——, after we had talked much on the matter—"I will step over and see her; but—it looks very—very strange!"

"Whatever whim may actuate her, I think it better, on the whole, to gratify her. Your refusal *may* be attended with infinitely worse effects than an interview. However, you shall hear from me again. I will see if she continues in the same mind; and if so, I will step over and tell you."—I took my leave.

A few moments before stepping down to dinner, I sat beside Miss P——, making my usual inquiries; and was gratified to find that her progress, though slow, seemed sure. I was leaving, when, with similar emphasis to that she had previously displayed, she again said:

"*Remember!* N—— MUST be here to-night!"

I was confounded. What could be the meaning of this mysterious pertinacity? I felt distracted with doubt, and dissatisfied with myself for what I had told to N——. I felt answerable for whatever ill effects might ensue; and yet what could I do?

It was evening—a mild, though lustrous July evening. The skies were all blue and white, save where the retiring sunlight produced a mellow mixture of colours towards the west. Not a breath of air disturbed the serene complacency. My wife and I sat on each side of the bed where lay our lovely invalid, looking, despite her illness, beautiful, and in comparative health. Her hair was parted with negligent simplicity over her pale forehead. Her eyes were brilliant, and her cheeks occasionally flushed. She spoke scarce a word to us as we sat beside her. I gazed at her with doubt and apprehension. I was aware that health could not possibly produce the colour and vivacity of her complexion and eyes; and felt at a loss to what I should refer it.

"Agnes, love!—How beautiful is the setting sun!" exclaimed my wife, drawing aside the curtains.

"Raise me! Let me look at it!" replied Miss P—— faintly. She gazed earnestly at the magnificent object for some minutes; and then abruptly said to me:

"He will be here soon?"

"In a few moments I expect him. But—Agnes—why do you wish to see him?"

She sighed, and shook her head.

It had been arranged that Dr. D—— should accompany Mr. N—— to my house, and conduct him upstairs, after strongly enjoining on him the necessity there was for controlling his feelings, and displaying as little emotion as possible. My heart leaped into my mouth—as the saying is—when I heard the expected knock at the door.

"N—— is come at last!" said I in a gentle tone, looking earnestly at her, to see if she was agitated. It was not the case. She sighed, but evinced no trepidation.

"Shall he be shown in at once?" I inquired.

"No—wait a few moments," replied the extraordinary girl, and seemed lost in thought for about a minute. "Now!" she exclaimed; and I sent down the nurse, herself pale and trembling with apprehension, to request the attendance of Dr. D—— and Mr. N——.

As they were heard slowly approaching the room, I looked anxiously at my patient, and kept my fingers at her pulse. There was not a symptom of flutter or agitation. At length the door was opened, and Dr. D—— slowly entered, with N—— upon his arm. As soon as his pale trembling figure was visible, a calm and heavenly smile beamed upon the countenance of Miss P——. It was full of ineffable loveliness! She stretched out her right arm; he pressed it to his lips, without uttering a word.

My eyes were riveted on the features of Miss P——. Either they deceived me, or I saw a strange alteration—as if a cloud were stealing over her face. I was right!—We all observed her colour fading rapidly. I rose from my chair; Dr. D—— also came nearer, thinking she was on the verge of fainting. Her eye was fixed upon the flushed features of her lover, and gleamed with radiance. She gently elevated both her arms towards him, and he leaned over her.

"PREPARE!" she exclaimed, in a low thrilling tone;—her features became paler and paler—her arms fell. She had spoken—she had breathed her last. She was dead!

Within twelve months poor N—— followed her; and, to the period of his death, no other word or thought seemed to occupy his mind but the momentous warning which had issued from the lips of Agnes P——, PREPARE!

I have no mystery to solve, no *dénouement* to make. I tell the facts as they occurred; and hope they may not be told in vain!

MARK LEMON

(1809–1870)

MARK LEMON started with the intention of becoming a playwright, but he will be best remembered as one of the founders and the first editor of *Punch.* He came to the task after an experience gained in turning out farces, burlesques, and libretti, in addition to contributions to *Household Words*, *The Illustrated London News*, and other journals. His editorial experience included periods in the "chair" of *The Family Herald* and *Once a Week.* He started writing novels late in life, and in this venture met with only fair success, although his shorter pieces are well worth preservation.

"The Adventures of a Christmas Turkey" is reprinted from *Tom Moody's Tales.*

THE ADVENTURES OF A CHRISTMAS TURKEY

SOME few years ago I met with a great sorrow, and as the hunting season was at an end, and I could not resort to my usual remedy for vexation, I turned sulky, and went alone to an out of the way seaside place on the coast of Sussex. It was a small ship-building town, and one fine July afternoon I was lying on the beach listening idly to the hammers and mallets of the shipwrights "closing rivets up" or caulking the sides of some storm-worn collier. The noise of a wandering circus band occasionally mingled with the sounds of industry, but were all sufficiently distant to make the quiet murmuring of the sea more distinct and soothing. Between me and the town were oyster-beds, fed by one or two creeks which were filled and emptied by the tides, and a tract of coarse brown grass which had grown up between the shingle long deserted by the sea. I had stolen away, as I have said, from a great grief, and sat looking upon the deep green waters, ever upheaving and falling as from the action of some mighty heart, that, like my own, was full to silence. I had strange dreams that day, lying lonely on the beach—dreams of other dreams which had made up much of my life which had passed, and, perhaps, of the life which is left to me. After a time some schoolboys came shouting and laughing across the brown grass to the seaside, and soon made playfellows of the waves, as though the restless waters had never wrecked mighty ships and drowned hosts of men, or torn down rocks, and cliffs, and solid masonry. The play ended, I was again alone, looking upon the sea, recalling the time when I had had such sport, and wondering if any of that merry group would ever sit, as I then sat, thankful for the silence and the solitude of the quiet shore. The solitude and silence were thus disturbed:

"If ever I catch you near those oyster-beds again, I'll rope's end you till you're as blue-lined as a sailor's shirt."

The speaker was evidently in earnest, and close behind me. He was a fiery-faced, white-headed old gentleman, of a nautical build, and the boy he held by the collar, and whom he was thus addressing, was seaborn also, as his suit of tar and canvas certified.

"I wasn't anigh 'em!" cried the boy. "I see another boy mucking [loitering] about there, but it wasn't me. You let me goa!" And the lad struggled like a dog-fish.

"I know that it was you," said Captain Crump (I afterwards learned the speaker's name); "and those periwinkles I found you boiling in your mother's teakettle came out of my beds, I've no doubt."

"They wasn't my winkles," replied the boy; "I never eats them; they always terrifies [annoys] me so when I does. You let me goa, or I'll kick your bad leg, I will."

Captain Crump gave his captive another hearty shake and a tap on the head with his walking-cane (the boy's skull must have been as strong as a cocoanut-shell not to have cracked with the blow), receiving a sharp kick in exchange, and the belligerents parted company.

The boy put a few yards between himself and the enemy, wiped his streaming eyes with the back of his hand, and, mounting a pile of shingle, bawled out:

"Captain Crump! Hallo, Captain Crump! how did you like your Christmas turkee?"

There was nothing particularly uncivil in the inquiry that I could discover, but it hit Captain Crump in a tender part, and set him gesticulating like an insane windmill—if you will allow me such a figure of speech.

That the Captain was mentally expressing a great deal no one could doubt who saw his distended eyes and cheeks, the latter being as red as his nose in its normal state, and nothing incombustible could be redder than that useful and prominent feature of Captain Crump's physiognomy. There is nothing new or remarkable in a red nose, I am aware. In fact, to mention such a distinction is commonplace; but Captain Crump, owner of the oyster and periwinkle beds, was a commonplace character, and he had a red nose.

The boy scampered away over the brown grass like a human plover (the *oyster-catcher*, perhaps), occasionally pausing to utter his cry of "Christmas turkee!" until he could no longer be heard, but only seen, evidently screaming in defiance of Captain Crump.

I do not know what there was in my appearance to justify the confidence, but the irritated gentleman stopped at the place where I was lying, and without any preface began the explanation of his late extraordinary display of temper and annoyance; and, to my surprise, I confess, I learned that the oysters and periwinkles had nothing to do with the matter.

I was glad to leave my own sad thoughts for a while, and therefore encouraged my new acquaintance to be communicative; and what he told me as we walked over the brown grass to Littletown, and what I gathered from the landlady of the Ship Torbay in the course of the ensuing evening, I will tell to you if you will listen to me.

On the extreme right of Littletown, looking towards the sea, stands a neat one-storied cottage, distinguished by a high flagstaff, from which, on high days and holidays, floats the union-jack or the Maltese cross, and on other days a man-o'-war's whip flouts any breeze that may be stirring. On one side of a neatly-kept garden, ornamented here and there with flint boulders and bordered with large shingle, is a wire inclosure containing a number of hencoops, formerly belonging to an Indiaman wrecked upon the coast in the year 18—. A variety of poultry strut, scratch, and peck away their lives within, being carefully, tenderly, and daily fed by Mrs. Crump, the kindly, good-natured spouse of Captain Crump, who is the proprietor of the aforesaid cottage, flagpost, flags, garden, boulders, shingle, hencoops, and poultry. An old ship's gun formerly stood at the foot of the flagpost; but, being discharged on some occasion of public rejoicing, it proved to have been cracked, and burst into a hundred pieces, fortunately doing no other damage than destroying all the front windows of Crump Cottage, and throwing Mrs. Crump's pet parrot into a fit of convulsions. The bird moulted, in consequence, all but its head feathers, and looked very like a late Vice-Chancellor in his bathing-dress and with his wig on.

On the extreme left of Littletown stood another villa of more urban pretensions, "verandahed, and stuccoed, and cockneyfied," according to Captain Crump, but made "snug and comfortable," according to the opinion of its owners, Mr. and Mrs. Macgrey; and I have no doubt but their estimate was the just one. Mr. Alexander Macgrey had made his own way in the world. From carrying a pedlar's pack, he had secured a small competency in a City warehouse, and, having no children to keep him in harness to the end of his days, had wisely written the word "Content" at the bottom of his last year's balance-sheet and come to settle at his wife's birthplace, Littletown. Captain William Crump was also a Littletownian, and, as a matter of course, had known Mrs. Macgrey when they were boy and girl together; but for some unguessed-at reason, Captain Crump resisted all approaches to intimacy on the part of the Macgreys—almost treating the gentleman with open rudeness. The ladies were more amiable, and never failed to recognise each other at church, or in the very small market-place, which boasted of one butcher's stall and a greengrocer's barrow, and now and then ventured to give each other the state of the weather when they passed in the street. The gentlemen bowed, sometimes; although one would have supposed that, being so nearly on an equality in point of station and education, they would have been glad of each other's society, as Littletown was only inhabited by boatbuilders, ship-chandlers, and their like.

Except John Bishopp, general shopkeeper, who added the cultivation of a few acres of land to the vending of the multifarious articles of his commercial establishment; he lived midway between the Crumps and the Macgreys and made his money out of both. John Bishopp was a jolly sort of man that everybody liked, and, as his business took him about the country a good deal, the management of the shop was principally left to Mrs. Bishopp, who was a good woman enough, as times go, although a bit of a shrew. John kept her in pretty fair order, and when he stayed rather later than he ought to have done over his pipe and alepot, he received (what he called) "his supper of carp-pie" with good humour, but always expected to hear no more of his delinquencies in the morning. A very wise regulation that of John Bishopp, and young couples would do well to adopt it. What say you, dear grandmamma, who have had some patching and botching of the matrimonial yoke to do in your time?

Captain William Crump was, as you may have imagined, a Captain by courtesy only. He had amassed money in many ways during some thirty years' service in the merchant navy, and had retired to Littletown to spend the evening of his busy life. He had rather a warm temper, which he kept well supplied with fuel in the form of three-quarter grog, although he never drank to excess, if you accepted his own notion of temperance. He had many odd opinions, whims, and prejudices, but was not a bad fellow, take him for all in all. One of his whims led to the incidents of this story, and with that we have, therefore, only to do at present. It was this: Having found it impossible to procure in Littletown a turkey for his Christmas dinner, 18—, he had determined before the next coming of that festive season to rear one for his own consumption, and had therefore added to Mrs. Crump's ornithological collection a fine young bird to be reared, fattened, and sacrificed at the Christmastide ensuing. It wrung the tender soul of Mrs. Crump to know that the pretty creature she tended daily, and which came at last to feed from her hand like her other favourites, was doomed to a culinary end; but her duty as a wife overcame her feelings as a philanthropist, and she saw with a melancholy pleasure the satisfactory progress of the condemned. One November night, however, by some unknown and undiscovered means the thriving bird broke its leg, and so serious was the fracture that amputation became necessary, to the great grief of Mrs. Crump and the exceeding wrath of her irritable husband. The turkey soon suffered in flesh from the absence of its lost member, and would probably have been unworthy its high destiny had not Captain Crump—handy as most sailors are—made it a wooden leg, which was so cleverly contrived that motion again became easy, and plumpness was restored long before the day of execution, which had been fixed for December the 22nd. On the morning of that day Mrs. Crump shut herself up in the bedroom, whilst Captain Crump and his man Jabez proceeded to execution in the stable, and it was some satisfaction to the sensitive lady to know that the victim made a most exemplary end, and died weighing 14 lb. 6 oz. As the Captain kept no quadruped except a cat, the turkey was suspended to the hook which usually supports the stable-lantern, and Crump and Jabez were both engaged in silent contemplation of the noble bird, when a gipsy-looking man approached, laden with branches of holly and mistletoe for sale. Now, one of Captain Crump's prejudices was a thorough hatred of the whole Bohemian race, declaring them to be, without exception, rogues and vagabonds of the worst kind; and it is believed he would have willingly subscribed to have chartered the *Great Eastern* and freighted her with all the tribes of Cooper, Lee, and Bonnys, provided the owners would have undertaken to have scuttled the Leviathan in the deepest depths of the Atlantic.

"Buy any holly and mistletoe?" asked the gipsy, "capital lot here, your honour, cheap."

"No!" roared Crump from the stable, whilst Jabez winked at the man and motioned him to be gone.

"Holly werry scarce, your honour," continued the gipsy, "and mistletoe hard to be got. Brought this ten mile, or more. You shall have it cheap."

"No!" again shouted Crump. "Do you think I'll encourage such scamps as you in destroying honest gentlemen's plantations in the dead of the night? No, you vagabond!"

"Easy, mister!" said the gipsy. "I've travelled this country these thirty years, and I couldn't do that if I stole holly or anything else. I bought it at C—— in open market, and ain't ashamed who sees me selling it."

Captain Crump's rejoinder contained several adjectives of an exceptional character, and cannot be recorded in these pages.

The gipsy had been used to hard words all his life; so, gathering up the holly and mistletoe which he had spread out for Captain Crump's inspection, said, mildly enough, "No harm done, master, as I see. A poor chap must try to turn an honest penny or starve, which you don't seem likely to do this Christmas. That's an uncommon fine turkey!"

"What's that to you, you ——" etc., etc., replied Crump.

"Oh, nothing; I'm sure of that. It's long afore you'd ask me to take my Christmas dinner at your expense," said the gipsy, leaning against the stable-door. "But it is an uncommon fine turkey, I'll pound it, whoever has the luck to eat it."

Now Captain Crump, like many seagoing people, had a strong dash of the superstitious in his composition, and he felt an unpleasant sensation as the gipsy spoke, although the words were simple enough. Before he could make any reply the man had said, "Good day, master," and walked away towards Littletown.

In a few minutes the gipsy was forgotten, and Mrs. Crump and the maid-servant were summoned to inspect and admire their future Christmas dinner; and it was a sad evidence of the selfishness of human nature when Mrs. Crump forgot all the past and asked, without a tremor in her voice, "whether it was to be boiled or roasted?"

Jabez did not sleep on the premises, and he was allowed to go home earlier than usual in order that he might ascertain who in Littletown were likely to have sausages, and to bespeak the quantity requisite for the proper adornment of the sacrifice. He had been gone some time, and the evening was closing in, when Captain Crump proceeded to shut the stable-door, and discovered to his annoyance that Jabez had taken the key with him. The ears of Jabez must have burned finely if warm words spoken behind his back could have quickened their circulation. Not that there was any real cause for anger, as Mrs. Crump had a duplicate key to the lock, and all was made secure for the night. "Fast bind, fast find," said the Captain, as he heard the bolt shoot home. And with that satisfactory conclusion he went to bed as the kitchen clock struck ten.

He awoke in the morning and found that adages are not always to be relied on, for the stable-door was still locked, but the turkey was gone; and Jabez vowed he had not seen the key since the day before.

Of course everyone suspects that the gipsy took away the key and then stole the turkey. It might have been so, for he was hiding something under some litter in an old hovel a good mile or more away from Littletown about twelve o'clock that very night.

Another of Captain Crump's prejudices was an objection to being laughed at, and he dreaded his loss becoming known to anyone—the Macgreys in particular—and therefore he all but swore the family to silence. Moreover, Crump had gone about the world with his eyes open, and he wisely concluded that if his lost dinner was to be cooked in Littletown he should smell it out the sooner by allowing the marauder to become bold from a false feeling of security. So Captain Crump and Jabez prowled about Littletown with still tongues, but with most observant eyes and noses.

December the twenty-third, and John Bishopp was tucking himself up snugly in his chaise-cart before his own shop-door preparatory to starting for C——, where he had business. It was a fresh frosty morning, with a briskish wind blowing about the curls and cap border of Mrs. Bishopp, who stood in the doorway to see all right and to give her husband a few words of advice at parting.

"Now, don't you be late, John," said Mrs. Bishopp. "Recollect to-morrow's Christmas Eve, and there's more than I can do, mind that."

"All right, my dear," replied John Bishopp.

"Mind it is all right," said his wife; "and don't you get keeping Christmas before it comes. I haven't forgot——"

Nor had John, evidently, for, with a wink and smile, he drove off at once, not thinking it necessary to wait for any more of Mrs. Bishopp's reminiscences.

Before that good helpmate could make up her mind to go indoors and cease looking after her husband, the gipsy had approached her with his Christmas ware.

"Buy a little holly, ma'am?" said the man; "berries uncommon scarce this Christmas."

"No. Go along, my man," answered Mrs. Bishopp. "I have no money to spare for such nonsense."

"I'll sell it you cheap, missus," continued the man, "and a bunch of mistletoe as well, though I don't think you need wait for that to have your share of the kissing."

"What do you mean by that, you impudent fellow?" said Mrs. Bishopp; "a dirty tramp like you talking in that way to me! If I could see the police I'd give you in charge, I would," and the insulted lady retired into her citadel and closed her castle-gate with a bang.

The gipsy scratched his head as though surprised at the reception of his compliment, and then muttered to himself,

"I should like to take the starch out of you, my lady; and if I only knew how, I'd do it. Why, she bristled up like a hotchy-witchy! * She'd make a first-rate romany † for the fiery old seacock at the flag-post yonder." And then bawling, "Any holly? Buy any holly or mis-

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* Hedgehog.

† Wife or companion.

tletoe?" at last found a customer in Mrs. Macgrey, who always gave Christmas a welcome after the manner of her ancestors.

The gipsy made so good a bargain that, as the December day closed in, he was found, clean shaven and tidily dressed, seated in the taproom of the Fox Inn, not far from the old hovel he had visited the night before. He was well known in those parts as a tinker, hawker, and higgler, and was a welcome visitor at most of the publics, as he could sing a score of songs, play on a tin whistle, and do many hanky-panky tricks with cards, to the wonder and amusement of the rustic frequenters of such places. He was a merry fellow always, and, though no one would have cared to stand bail for his honesty, none could prove him to have been dishonest. Ah! I know what you are about to say. What was he hiding in the old hovel? It is thought to be cant nowadays to say that such a man as the gipsy, was as honest, according to his lights, as many a well-to-do gentleman who never had the one-thousandth part of the temptations to go wrong that our poor Bohemian has had crossing his path since he was old enough to beg a penny by the roadside. Hunger, cold, hard words, and hard thoughts of him have invited him at times to evil; and now and then he had listened to the tempter and gone a mile or two on the broad way that leads to perdition. And the recording angel has had, haply, to write down many kindly actions of the gipsy's life and many a wrong resisted; so let us not sit in judgment upon him.

Still, you ask, and rightly, what did he hide in the old hovel?

Why, Captain Crump's Christmas turkey, to be sure, prompted thereto by an irresistible desire to revenge himself on the fiery old skipper. And there gipsy was at the Fox Inn, waiting until the young moon should have made her short journey in the heavens, to recover the hidden turkey and replace it in Captain Crump's stable before the morning. It was a foolish and dangerous jest, and might have stopped the gipsy's rambles for many a long month.

Two jolly-faced men in a chaise-cart are approaching the Fox Inn. Both speak somewhat thickly, and roll against each other now and then, or sway about with the motion of the cart. The driver is John Bishopp, and the other the host of the Fox Inn, whom John picked up in the morning on his way to C——. John had been repelling his friend's repeated invitation to alight when they should get to the Fox, and his resistance had been growing weaker and weaker ever since the bright windows of the inn had shown themselves, contrasting their ruddy glow with the cold grey of the winter's night. As John pulled up at the door, the last hearty chorus to one of the gipsy's songs came pealing from within, and drove away all the little good resolution remaining to the Littletown trader. The ostler was roused up, the horse led into an adjoining shed, and ordered "a bit of wet hay and a horsecloth," as Mr. Bishopp would stay only five minutes. When the ostler was again roused up from his sleep in the shed, beside the horse and the chaise-cart, he could have sworn he had been dozing an hour.

John Bishopp and his friend, mine host of the Fox, were soon at their ease in the little bar-parlour, toasting each other a "Merry Christmas" in some steaming mixture, and listening to

THE TINKER'S SONG

'Tis I am the tinker, Joe,
And where is there one like me,
If your saucepans are only so, so,
And your kettles won't boil for tea?
In my tent there is never a table,
Our furniture's rather queer,
But I eats of the best when I'm able,
Or puts up with bacon and beer!
Oh, there's nothing like tinkering!

I envy no king or churchwarden
As spouts at the parish boards,
And I'm sure I'd not give a farden
To sit in the House of Lords!
Though my tent has got many a flaw,
Where the wind when it likes may pass,
In the winter I sleep upon straw,
And in summer I sleeps on the grass.
Oh, there's nothing like tinkering!

The two cronies would have sat out the night had not the mistress of the inn stopped the supplies and sent out the gipsy to order Mr. Bishopp's horse. A quarter of an hour passed before the chaise came to the door, the ostler having been very hard to wake, at least so said the gipsy. The parting between John Bishopp and his crony was somewhat tedious and tautological, and the combined efforts of the ostler, the host, and the gipsy were required to place John comfortably in his chaise-cart. Once up, he was "all right," and as the horse had travelled the same road a hundred times before there was no doubt of a safe journey to John Bishopp.

Leaving the topers at the Fox to finish their orgy and go home as they list, we will stop at John Bishopp's shop, as the boy is putting up the shutters and the master has driven to the door. The "carp-pie" would be very hot and highly seasoned that night, for it was too evident to Mrs. Bishopp how her husband had been employing the later hours of the day. John contented himself by standing, or rather wobbling, at the head of the horse, and merely remarking, "Whoa!" at certain intervals, whilst Mrs. Bishopp, her assistant, and the maid unloaded the cart, placing the various packages on the counter.

"Now, Mr. Bishopp, let Tom take the horse to the stable, if you please; and if you are able to walk come into the shop, and don't let the neighbours see the state you're in. Now, Mr. Bishopp." And the angry woman's voice might have been heard all over Littletown and miles out at sea.

John, with much "backing and filling," managed to make the doorway, and then, with great judgment, brought up alongside the counter, and made himself fast with his hands, whilst Mrs. Bishopp overhauled the cargo and required John to check it.

"Six pounds of black tea," said Mrs. Bishopp.

"Ri-i-ght," replied John.

"Twelve pounds of candles."

"Ri-i-ght, my dear."

"A gross of lucifers."

"Cor-rect, 'Lizabeth."

"Two sides of bacon."

"Streaky—ri-i-ght."

"Four Dutch cheeses."

"Four's the lot."

"And a turkey," said Mrs. Bishopp, adding, "whatever you bought that for I *don't* know."

Nor John either. "A tur-ur-key?" he asked, opening both his eyes until they seemed like the two lenses of an opera-glass. "I haven't bought a turkey, Mrs. B-ishopp."

"You don't know what you *have* bought, it strikes me," said the justly-angered wife. "Here's a turkey sure enough, and, as I live, it's got a wooden leg."

John tried to obtain a nearer view of the bird, but, lurching (to preserve our nautical metaphors) a good deal in the endeavour, put his larboard fin into the treacle-jar which had been left on the counter. Tom, the shop lad, and Susan, the maid, were quite justified in laughing aloud, although it made Mrs. Bishopp more angry.

John could not bring his confused mind to recognise this turkey. He tried to recall the day's proceedings, the persons he had met, and the subjects of his conversation, and he always stopped at the second glass "hot without sugar" in the little bar-parlour of the Fox Inn.

The mystery is soon explained. When the gipsy heard that Mr. Bishopp had arrived at the Fox, and was disposed to remain there, certain collections of Mrs. Bishopp's hard words came back to him, and the spirit of mischief whispered in his ear to send Captain Crump's turkey as a present to his enemy, nothing doubting but Fortune would manufacture some small tribulation out of it, and so revenge him for the morning's indignity.

It was with this intent that the gipsy had offered his services to call the ostler, but before arousing the sleeper the turkey was taken from the old hovel and deposited in John Bishopp's cart. Consequently the morning brought no clearer knowledge to John Bishopp as to his possession of the wooden-legged stranger, and he was half inclined to drive to the Fox and make some inquiries, but his own fear of ridicule and Mrs. Bishopp forbade it.

Mrs. Macgrey, we have seen, was an observer of old Christmas customs, and in the course of making her preparation for the next day, called at the multifarious establishment of John Bishopp, little thinking that she should there find hanging at the back of the shop one of the desires of her hospitable heart—a Christmas turkey.

"What a beauty! What a weight! What a rarity in Littletown! Was it very dear?"

Now, Mrs. Bishopp, as soon as she awoke that morning, had questioned John upon the purchase of the turkey, but, as I have said, he could remember nothing about it. John's money was right enough, except a shilling or so; still, he might have bought it on credit, and a demand for payment would certainly arrive from some quarter or the other. The careful tradeswoman, therefore, made sure of a market, and Mrs. Macgrey went home the happy possessor (as she believed) of the only turkey in Littletown.

For two days Crump Cottage had been anything but an Agapemone. Captain Crump kept his anger at his loss bottled up when abroad, but drew the cork the moment he arrived at home. Jabez generally received the first bumper of wrath, and the remainder was very fairly distributed between Mrs. Crump and the maid-servant. Not the least tidings had reached Crump of his lost dinner, and to-morrow was Christmas Day. So incensed and so incoherent was he at last, that he threatened to hang Jabez up as a stable lantern and put Mrs. Crump in a hencoop. Jabez liked his place and liked his old master also, despite his fiery temper, and so he made no remonstrance, but walked down quietly to Littletown, determined to make some private inquiries. It so chanced that John Bishopp was the first person Jabez met, and, as John stood very high in his opinion, Jabez resolved to confide the secret to him. As he unbosomed himself John Bishopp changed red and purple (being the only colours he was capable of displaying), and, as he said to his wife, "felt as though one was pouring cold water down his back," which was not a pleasant sensation on a frosty December day. John wisely kept silent, however, as visions of the magistrate's bench and the county gaol presented themselves. He, John Bishopp, was, without doubt, a receiver of stolen goods, and how to account for the possession he knew not! So, promising Jabez not to mention what he had told him, except to his wife, and faithfully intending to keep his word, for his own sake, John Bishopp hurried home as fast as he could.

Mrs. Bishopp was somewhat startled at her husband's haggard appearance, but consoled herself with the hope that it was the proper consequence of his yesterday's irregularity. She was not left long in doubt; for John beckoned her into their little parlour and closed the door when she had entered.

"Elizabeth," said John, in a hoarse whisper, "where's that turkey?"

"Sold to Mrs. Macgrey, I'm thankful to say," replied the wife. John fairly reeled at the intelligence, and sat down flop in the old leather chair by the fire.

It was some time before he could repeat, in answer to his wife's inquiries, the story he had heard from Jabez, and its effect was nearly as terrible upon the wife as upon the husband.

"Oh, John, John, this comes of your love of drinking! Stolen? And from Captain Crump! Our good name's gone for ever": and Mrs. Bishopp, believing what she said, set up a tremendous bellowing. The sight of his wife's sorrow roused up John.

"No, my dear, not so bad as that. It's an awkward job, for certain, but our character's too good to be hurt by it. At worst it will only be a row with old Crump, should he ever hear the truth on't."

John Bishopp, why not have gone, like a man, and told the tale to Captain Crump, and not allowed him to learn the truth from his stable-door?

Yes, from his stable-door; for on opening it on December the 24th he found on the inside what follows, written in chalk:

if you wants to no ware your turke is arsk missus bishup.

Captain Crump nearly committed apoplexy, so irate was he on reading the above, for it was now evident that someone had access to his stable whenever he pleased, and might, for aught that he knew to the contrary, pay nocturnal visits to his larder and wine-cellar. However, when he had cooled down a little, he determined to take the door's advice, and, as he did want to know where his turkey was, he would ask Mrs. Bishopp—and he did.

Mrs. Bishopp was only a woman, and an ignorant one into the bargain. She had therefore that disregard for the truth which usually distinguishes such persons when they are in a position of difficulty, and resolutely resolved to screen herself and her husband the moment she saw Captain Crump enter the shop, guessing his errand.

"Mrs. Bishopp," said Crump emphatically, and without pausing to sit down, "have you a turkey?"

"A turkey! Captain Crump?" replied Mrs. Bishopp, smiling. "La, bless you, sir, turkeys ain't for people in our state of life."

"No, I know that," said Crump; "but I've lost one that I've been rearing these ten months, and some —— has stolen it."

"Not me, I beg to say, Captain Crump," observed Mrs. Bishopp, with a toss of her head.

"I don't say you have," answered Crump; "but some one chalked on my stable-door, 'If you want to know where your turkey is, ask Mrs. Bishopp!' "

"And now you have done so, and got your answer, Captain Crump, perhaps you'll inquire elsewhere," said Mrs. Bishopp, affecting to be hurt and indignant; and, as Crump had no further evidence to offer, he was about to depart, when a servant-girl opened the door and said, without entering the shop:

"Did you know our turkey's got a wooden leg?"

Captain Crump had always been a man of action and decision, and he proved eminently so on the present occasion; for, before Mrs. Bishopp could utter a word in reply, Crump had fixed the maid-servant's head between the shop-door and the post, and was furiously demanding who she was, where she came from, and whence she had got a turkey. The cries of the girl were the only answers to his inquiries; and, Mrs. Bishopp having succeeded in releasing the unfortunate domestic, the affrighted creature ran with all speed to her master's house, followed at a much diminished rate by Captain Crump.

Could he believe his eyes! Yes, she enters the house of the man he dislikes most in Littletown, if not in the universe. If that turkey is his turkey, what a Christmas dinner of revenge he will have! Thirty years—well, presently.

Captain Crump hastened home, and informed his wife of the discovery he had made, put on his best coat, and posted off, despite the earnest remonstrances of Mrs. Crump, to the police-office, and there obtained the assistance of the stolid young man who paraded the streets of Littletown as guardian of the peace.

Captain Crump knocked at Mr. Macgrey's with an emphasis that declared him to be master of the situation; and the consternation of the maid may be imagined when, on opening the door, she discovered her assailant of the morning, and instantly rushed into the back garden. Captain Crump and the officer did not stand for the ceremony of an introduction, but proceeded at once to the kitchen, and there, sure enough, was the abducted turkey, partly plucked of its feathers, but retaining still its wooden leg.

The stupid policeman, acting under the directions of the captain, seized the bird, and then entered the parlour where Mr. and Mrs. Macgrey were seated, perfectly unconscious of their perilous position.

Captain Crump's lips quivered, and his ruby nose glowed like a hot coal, as he delivered himself as follows: "Officer, the turkey which you hold in your hands is my property. You know where you found it; and I give that man into custody as a thief or a receiver."

The effect of this speech may be imagined. Mr. Macgrey, ordinarily a peaceful man, was for knocking the speaker down with the poker; but his wife's better discretion interposed and she attempted to account for their possession of the turkey.

Captain Crump was obduracy itself. He would hear of no explanation from anyone, and kept iterating, each time with increasing energy, "Officer, do your duty!" And there is little doubt but that the stupid policeman would have dragged off Mr. Macgrey had not Mrs. Crump arrived at the scene of action, and, by a counter command, delayed that unpleasant operation.

Captain Crump was not the man to be mollified by uxorial intervention; and the stupid policeman stood like the traditional donkey between two bundles of hay, not knowing whom to obey. At last Mrs. Macgrey said, in her softest tones:

"William! William Crump!"

Crump started as though a voice from the spirit-world had spoken.

"William!" repeated Mrs. Macgrey, "is there to be no forgiveness between us? I know the cause of this violence, and am ashamed of you, William."

Mrs. Crump began to bridle a little at this.

"Thirty years ago, when we were almost boy and girl in this place, we thought we were in love with each other."

Mrs. Crump gave a short angry cough.

"In that time, when we walked hand-in-hand on yonder seashore, the moon and the sea the only witnesses to the loving words then spoken——"

Mrs. Crump said, "Well, I'm sure!" and Mr. Macgrey blew his nose pettishly.

"At that time, William, could we have believed that you would seek to bring sorrow and disgrace to me—me, your once loved Mary?"

The stupid policeman being ordered out of the room by general consent walked, from force of habit, straight to the kitchen.

"Answer me, William. Is all forgotten? Can you do this cruel thing?" said Mrs. Macgrey, laying her hand gracefully on Crump's shoulder.

Crump tried to reply, but found he had a great ball in his throat, and so he could only point at Mr. Macgrey and then at the fourth finger of his own left hand.

"True, I have married another; so have you," said Mrs. Macgrey.

"Well, I'm glad you've remembered that at last," said Mrs. Crump, fairly nettled. "I thought such a trifling circumstance had escaped your recollection."

"So did I," grunted Macgrey.

"Are you all angry with me?" asked the candid Mrs. Macgrey, quite theatrically. "Had I married him, Mrs. Crump, you would not have been the happy woman I know you to be—and deserve to be."

"Alexander," she paused until Mr. Macgrey raised his eyes from the carpet at which he had been intently gazing, "did I not give you the preference—if that was a gift worth having?"

"William, William Crump, I gave you the chance of marrying a worthier woman than myself. Take her to your heart and own I speak the truth."

Crump had nothing for it but to open his arms and press his lawful wife to his full-frilled bosom.

Alexander Macgrey accepted a similar invitation from his Mary, silently wishing, however, that this *confessio amoris* had not been necessary.

As a matter of course, the two ladies next embraced each other, and the two gentlemen, for the first time in their lives, shook hands, vowing a lifelong friendship; and it was arranged that the turkey, which had so nearly brought discord among them, should furnish forth their Christmas dinner. The story of the turkey oozed out by degrees, and the gipsy has not been seen in Littletown for some time, whilst John Bishopp is reported to have turned his fright to such good account that he has never been more than properly jolly ever since. The only ill consequence that has remained is, the opportunity afforded to a few of the worst boys in Littletown to tease Captain Crump by impertinent inquiries about his last Christmas dinner.

DR. JOHN BROWN

(1810–1882)

DR. JOHN BROWN, who was born in Biggar in Lanarkshire, was the son of Dr. John Brown (1784-1858), the biblical scholar, who was at that time the secession minister there. In 1833 he graduated as doctor of medicine and practised in Edinburgh, where he spent the whole of his life. In literature, he is famous as the author of *Horæ Subsecivæ* (1851, 1861, 1882), which brought him much popularity and many friends, including Lord Jeffrey, Lord Cockburn, Ruskin, and Thackeray.

"Rab and His Friends" was first published in 1859.

RAB AND HIS FRIENDS

FOUR-AND-THIRTY years ago, Bob Ainslie and I were coming up Infirmary Street from the High School, our heads together, and our arms intertwisted, as only lovers and boys know how, or why.

When we got to the top of the street, and turned north, we espied a crowd at the Tron Church. "A dog-fight!" shouted Bob, and was off; and so was I, both of us all but praying that it might not be over before we got up! And is not this boy-nature? and human nature too? and don't we all wish a house on fire not to be out before we see it? Dogs like fighting; old Isaac says they "delight" in it, and for the best of all reasons; and boys are not cruel because they like to see the fight. They see three of the great cardinal virtues of dog or man—courage, endurance, and skill—in intense action. This is very different from a love of making dogs fight, and enjoying, and aggravating, and making gain by their pluck. A boy—be he ever so fond himself of fighting, if he be a good boy, hates and despises all this, but he would have run off with Bob and me fast enough: it is a natural and a not wicked interest that all boys and men have in witnessing intense energy in action.

Does any curious and finely-ignorant woman wish to know how Bob's eye at a glance announced a dog-fight to his brain? He did not, he could not, see the dogs fighting; it was a flash of an inference, a rapid induction. The crowd round a couple of dogs fighting is a crowd masculine mainly, with an occasional active, compassionate woman, fluttering wildly round the outside, and using her tongue and her hands freely upon the men, as so many "brutes"; it is a crowd annular, compact, and mobile; a crowd centripetal, having its eyes and its heads all bent downwards and inwards, to one common focus.

Well, Bob and I are up, and find it is not over: a small thoroughbred, white bull terrier, is busy throttling a large shepherd's dog, unaccustomed to war, but not to be trifled with. They are hard at it; the scientific little fellow doing his work in great style, his pastoral enemy fighting wildly, but with the sharpest of teeth and a great courage. Science and breeding, however, soon had their own; the Game Chicken, as the premature Bob called him, working his way up, took his final grip of poor Yarrow's throat—and he lay gasping and done for. His master, a brown, handsome, big young shepherd from Tweedsmuir, would have liked to have knocked down any man, would "drink up Esil, or eat a crocodile," for that part, if he had a chance: it was no use kicking the little dog; that would only make him hold the closer. Many were the means shouted out in mouthfuls, of the best possible ways of ending it. "Water!" but there was none near, and many cried for it who might have got it from the well at Blackfriars Wynd. "Bite the tail!" and a large, vague, benevolent, middle-aged man, more desirous than wise, with some struggle got the bushy end of Yarrow's tail into his ample mouth, and bit it with all his might. This was more than enough for the much-enduring, much-perspiring shepherd, who, with a gleam of joy over his broad visage, delivered a terrific facer upon our large, vague, benevolent, middle-aged friend —who went down like a shot.

Still the Chicken holds; death not far off. "Snuff! a pinch of snuff!" observed a calm, highly-dressed young buck, with an eyeglass in his eye. "Snuff, indeed!" growled the angry crowd, affronted and glaring. "Snuff! a pinch of snuff!" again observes the buck, but with more urgency; whereupon were produced several open boxes, and from a mull which may have been at Culloden, he took a pinch, knelt down, and presented it to the nose of the Chicken. The laws of physiology and of snuff take their course; the Chicken sneezes, and Yarrow is free!

The young pastoral giant stalks off with Yarrow in his arms—comforting him.

But the bull terrier's blood is up, and his soul unsatisfied; he grips the first dog he meets, and discovering she is not a dog, in Homeric phrase, he makes a brief sort of *amende*, and is off. The boys, with Bob and me at their head, are after him: down Niddry Street he goes, bent on mischief; up the Cowgate like an arrow—Bob and I, and our small men, panting behind.

There, under the single arch of the South Bridge, is a huge mastiff, sauntering down the middle of the causeway, as if with his hands in his pockets: he is old, grey, brindled, as big as a little Highland bull, and has the Shakespearean dewlaps shaking as he goes.

The Chicken makes straight at him, and fastens on his throat. To our astonishment, the great creature does nothing but stand still, hold himself up, and roar—yes, roar; a long, serious, remonstrative roar. How is this? Bob and I are up to them. *He is muzzled!* The bailies had proclaimed a general muzzling, and his master, studying strength and economy mainly, had encompassed his huge jaws in a home-made apparatus, constructed out of the leather of some ancient *breechin*. His mouth was open as far as it could; his lips curled up in rage—a sort of terrible grin; his teeth gleaming, ready, from out the darkness; the strap across his mouth tense as a bowstring; his whole frame stiff with indignation and surprise; his roar asking us all round, "Did you ever see the like of this?" He looked a statue of anger and astonishment, done in Aberdeen granite.

We soon had a crowd: the Chicken held on. "A knife!" cried Bob; and a cobbler gave him his knife: you know the kind of knife, worn away obliquely to a point, and always keen. I put its edge to the tense leather; it ran before it; and then!—one sudden jerk of that enormous head, a sort of dirty mist about his mouth, no noise—and the bright and fierce little fellow is dropped, limp, and dead. A solemn pause: this was more than any of us had bargained for. I turned the little fellow over, and saw he was quite dead: the mastiff had taken him by the small of the back like a rat, and broken it.

He looked down at his victim appeased, ashamed, and amazed; snuffed him all over, stared at him, and taking a sudden thought, turned round and trotted off. Bob took the dead dog up, and said, "John, we'll bury him after tea." "Yes," said I, and was off after the mastiff. He made up the Cowgate at a rapid swing; he had forgotten some engagement. He turned up the Candlemaker Row, and stopped at the Harrow Inn.

There was a carrier's cart ready to start, and a keen, thin, impatient, black-a-vised little man, his hand at his grey horse's head, looking about angrily for something. "Rab, ye thief!" said he, aiming a kick at my great friend, who drew cringing up, and avoiding the heavy shoe with more agility than dignity, and watching his master's eye, slunk dismayed under the cart—his ears down, and as much as he had of tail down too.

What a man this must be—thought I—to whom my tremendous hero turns tail! The carrier saw the muzzle hanging, cut and useless, from his neck, and I eagerly told him the story, which Bob and I always thought, and still think, Homer, or King David, or Sir Walter, alone were worthy to rehearse. The severe little man was mitigated, and condescended to say, "Rab, ma man, puir Rabbie"—whereupon the stump of a tail rose up, the ears were cocked, the eyes filled, and were comforted; the two friends were reconciled. "Hupp!" and a stroke of the whip were given to Jess; and off went the three.

Bob and I buried the Game Chicken that night (we had not much of a tea) in the back-green of his house, in Melville Street, No. 17, with considerable gravity and silence; and being at the time in the Iliad, and, like all boys, Trojans, we called him Hector of course.

Six years have passed—a long time for a boy and a dog: Bob Ainslie is off to the wars; I am a medical student, and clerk at Minto House Hospital.

Rab I saw almost every week, on the Wednesday; and we had much pleasant intimacy. I found the way to his heart by frequent scratching of his huge head, and an occasional bone. When I did not notice him he would plant himself straight before me, and stand wagging that bud of a tail, and looking up, with his head a little to the one side. His master I occasionally saw; he used to call me "Maister John," but was laconic as any Spartan.

One fine October afternoon, I was leaving the hospital, when I saw the large gate open, and in walked Rab, with that great and easy saunter of his. He looked as if taking general possession of the place; like the Duke of Wellington entering a subdued city, satiated with victory and peace. After him came Jess, now white from age, with her cart; and in it a woman carefully wrapped up—the carrier leading the horse anxiously, and looking back. When he saw me, James (for his name was James Noble) made a curt and grotesque "boo," and said, "Maister John, this is the mistress; she's got a trouble in her breest—some kind o' an income we're thinkin'."

By this time I saw the woman's face; she was sitting on a sack filled with straw, with her husband's plaid round her, and his big-coat, with its large white metal buttons, over her feet.

I never saw a more unforgettable face—pale, serious, *lonely*,* delicate, sweet, without being at all what we call fine. She looked sixty, and had on a mutch, white as snow, with its black ribbon; her silvery, smooth hair setting off her dark-grey eyes—eyes such as one sees only twice or thrice in a lifetime, full of suffering, full also of the overcoming of it: her eyebrows black and delicate,† and her mouth firm, patient, and contented, which few mouths ever are.

As I have said, I never saw a more beautiful countenance, or one more subdued to settled quiet. "Ailie," said James, "this is Maister John, the young doctor; Rab's freend, ye ken. We often speak aboot you, doctor." She smiled, and made a movement, but said nothing; and prepared to come down, putting her plaid aside and rising. Had Solomon, in all his glory, been handing down the Queen of Sheba at his palace gate, he could not have done it more daintily, more tenderly, more like a gentleman, than did James the Howgate carrier, when he lifted down Ailie his wife. The contrast of his small, swarthy, weather-beaten, keen, worldly face to hers—pale, subdued, and beautiful—was something wonderful. Rab looked on, concerned and puzzled, but ready for anything that might turn up—were it to strangle the nurse, the porter, or even me. Ailie and he seemed great friends.

"As I was sayin', she's got a kind o' trouble in her breest, doctor; wull ye tak' a look at it?" We walked into the consulting room, all four; Rab grim and comic, willing to be happy and confidential if cause could be shown, willing also to be the reverse, on the same terms. Ailie sat down, undid her open gown and her lawn handkerchief round her neck, and, without a word, showed me her right breast. I looked at and examined it carefully—she and James watching me, and Rab eyeing all three. What could I say? there it was, that had once been so soft, so shapely, so white, so gracious and bountiful, so "full of all blessed conditions,"—hard as a stone, a centre of horrid pain, making that pale face, with its grey, lucid, reasonable eyes, and its sweet resolved mouth, express the full measure of suffering overcome. Why was that gentle, modest, sweet woman, clean and lovable, condemned by God to bear such a burden?

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* It is not easy giving this look by one word; it was expressive of her being so much of her life alone.

† . . . Black brows, they say,
Become some women best; so that there be not
Too much hair there, *but in a semicircle,*
Or a half-moon made with a pen.
—A WINTER'S TALE.

I got her away to bed. "May Rab and me bide?" said James. "*You* may; and Rab, if he will behave himself." "I'se warrant he's do that, doctor"; and in slunk the faithful beast. I wish you could have seen him. There are no such dogs now. He belonged to a lost tribe. As I have said, he was brindled, and grey like Rubislaw granite; his hair short, hard, and close, like a lion's; his body thick-set, like a little bull—a sort of compressed Hercules of a dog. He must have been ninety pounds' weight, at the least; he had a large blunt head; his muzzle black as night, his mouth blacker than any night, a tooth or two—being all he had—gleaming out of his jaws of darkness. His head was scarred with the records of old wounds, a sort of series of fields of battle all over it; one eye out, one ear cropped as close as was Archbishop Leighton's father's; the remaining eye had the power of two; and above it, and in constant communication with it, was a tattered rag of an ear, which was for ever unfurling itself, like an old flag; and then that bud of a tail, about one inch long, if it could in any sense be said to be long, being as broad as long—the mobility, the instantaneousness of that bud were very funny and surprising, and its expressive twinklings and winkings, the intercommunications between the eye, the ear, and it, were of the oddest and swiftest.

Rab had the dignity and simplicity of great size; and having fought his way all along the road to absolute supremacy, he was as mighty in his own line as Julius Caesar or the Duke of Wellington, and had the gravity * of all great fighters.

You must have often observed the likeness of certain men to certain animals, and of certain dogs to men. Now, I never look at Rab without thinking of the great Baptist preacher, Andrew Fuller.† The same large, heavy, menacing, combative, sombre, honest countenance, the same deep inevitable eye, the same look, as of thunder asleep, but ready—neither a dog nor a man to be trifled with.

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* A Highland game-keeper, when asked why a certain terrier, of singular pluck, was so much more solemn than the other dogs, said, "Oh, sir, life's full o' sariousness to him—he just never can get eneuch o' fechtin'."

† Fuller was, in early life, when a farmer lad at Soham, famous as a boxer; not quarrelsome, but not without "the stern delight" a man of strength and cour-

Next day, my master, the surgeon, examined Ailie. There was no doubt it must kill her, and soon. It could be removed—it might never return—it would give her speedy relief—she should have it done. She curtsied, looked at James, and said, "When?" "To-morrow," said the kind surgeon—a man of few words. She and James and Rab and I retired. I noticed that he and she spoke little, but seemed to anticipate everything in each other. The following day, at noon, the students came in, hurrying up the great stair. At the first landing-place, on a small well-known black board, was a bit of paper fastened by wafers, and many remains of old wafers beside it. On the paper were the words, "An operation to-day.—J. B. *Clerk.*"

Up ran the youths, eager to secure good places: in they crowded, full of interest and talk. "What's the case?" "Which side is it?"

Don't think them heartless; they are neither better nor worse than you or I: they get over their professional horrors, and into their proper work; and in them pity, as an *emotion,* ending in itself or at best in tears and a long-drawn breath, lessens—while pity, as a *motive,* is quickened, and gains power and purpose. It is well for poor human nature that it is so.

The operating theatre is crowded; much talk and fun, and all the cordiality and stir of youth. The surgeon with his staff of assistants is there. In comes Ailie; one look at her quiets and abates the eager students. That beautiful old woman is too much for them; they sit down, and are dumb, and gaze at her. These rough boys feel the power of her presence. She walks in quickly, but without haste; dressed in her mutch, her neckerchief, her white dimity short-gown, her black bombazeen petticoat, showing her white worsted stockings and her carpet-shoes. Behind her was James with Rab. James sat down in the distance, and took that huge and noble head between his knees. Rab looked perplexed and dangerous; for ever cocking his ear and dropping it as fast.

Ailie stepped up on a seat, and laid herself on the table, as her friend the surgeon told her; arranged herself, gave a rapid look at James, shut her eyes, rested herself on me, and took my hand. The operation

age feels in their exercise. Dr. Charles Stewart of Dunearn, whose rare gifts and graces as a physician, a divine, a scholar, and a gentleman, live only in the memory of those few who knew and survive him, liked to tell how Mr. Fuller used to say, that when he was in the pulpit, and saw a *buirdly* man come along the passage, he would instinctively draw himself up, measure his imaginary antagonist, and forecast how he would deal with him, his hands meanwhile condensing into fists, and tending to "square." He must have been a hard hitter if he boxed as he preached—what "The Fancy" would call "an ugly customer."

was at once begun; it was necessarily slow; and chloroform—one of God's best gifts to his suffering children—was then unknown. The surgeon did his work. The pale face showed its pain, but was still and silent. Rab's soul was working within him; he saw that something strange was going on—blood flowing from his mistress, and she suffering; his ragged ear was up, and importunate; he growled and gave now and then a sharp impatient yelp; he would have liked to have done something to that man. But James had him firm, and gave him a *glower* from time to time, and an intimation of a possible kick; all the better for James, it kept his eye and his mind off Ailie.

It is over: she is dressed, steps gently and decently down from the table, looks for James; then, turning to the surgeon and the students, she curtsies—and in a low, clear voice, begs their pardon if she has behaved ill. The students—all of us—wept like children; the surgeon happed her up carefully, and, resting on James and me, Ailie went to her room, Rab following. We put her to bed. James took off his heavy shoes, crammed with tackets, heel-capt and toe-capt, and put them carefully under the table, saying, "Maister John, I'm for nane o' yer strynge nurse bodies for Ailie. I'll be her nurse, and I'll gang aboot on my stockin' soles as canny as pussy." And so he did; and handy and clever, and swift and tender as any woman, was that horny-handed, snell, peremptory little man. Everything she got he gave her: he seldom slept; and often I saw his small shrewd eyes out of the darkness, fixed on her. As before, they spoke little.

Rab behaved well, never moving, showing us how meek and gentle he could be, and occasionally, in his sleep, letting us know that he was demolishing some adversary. He took a walk with me every day, generally to the Candlemaker Row; but he was sombre and mild; declined doing battle, though some fit cases offered, and indeed submitted to sundry indignities; and was always very ready to turn, and came faster back, and trotted up the stair with much lightness, and went straight to that door.

Jess, the mare, had been sent, with her weather-worn cart, to Howgate, and had doubtless her own dim and placid meditations and confusions, on the absence of her master and Rab, and her unnatural freedom from the road and her cart.

For some days Ailie did well. The wound healed "by the first intention"; for as James said, "Oor Ailie's skin's ower clean to beil." The students came in quiet and anxious, and surrounded her bed. She said she liked to see their young, honest faces. The surgeon dressed her, and spoke to her in his own short kind way, pitying her through his eyes, Rab and James outside the circle—Rab being now reconciled, and even cordial, and having made up his mind that as yet nobody required worrying, but, as you may suppose, *semper paratus*.

So far well: but, four days after the operation, my patient had a sudden and long shivering, a "groosin," as she called it. I saw her soon after; her eyes were too bright, her cheek coloured; she was restless, and ashamed of being so; the balance was lost; mischief had begun. On looking at the wound, a blush of red told the secret; her pulse was rapid, her breathing anxious and quick; she wasn't herself, as she said, and was vexed at her restlessness. We tried what we could. James did everything, was everywhere; never in the way, never out of it; Rab subsided under the table into a dark place, and was motionless, all but his eye, which followed everyone. Ailie got worse; began to wander in her mind, gently; was more demonstrative in her ways to James, rapid in her questions, and sharp at times. He was vexed, and said, "She was never that way afore; no, never." For a time she knew her head was wrong, and was always asking our pardon—the dear gentle old woman: then delirium set in strong, without pause. Her brain gave way, and then came that terrible spectacle,

> The intellectual power, through words and things,
> Went sounding on its dim and perilous way;

she sang bits of old songs and Psalms, stopping suddenly, mingling the Psalms of David, and the diviner words of his Son and Lord, with homely odds and ends and scraps of ballads.

Nothing more touching, or in a sense more strangely beautiful, did I ever witness. Her tremulous, rapid, affectionate, eager, Scotch voice, the swift, aimless, bewildered mind, the baffled utterance, the bright and perilous eye; some wild words, some household cares, something for James, the names of the dead, Rab called rapidly and in a "fremyt" voice, and he starting up, surprised, and slinking off as if he were to blame somehow, or had been dreaming he heard. Many eager questions and beseechings which James and I could make nothing of, and on which she seemed to set her all, and then sink back ununderstood. It was very sad, but better than many things that are not called sad. James hovered about, put out and miserable, but active and exact as ever; read to her, when there was a lull, short bits from the Psalms, prose and metre, chanting the latter in his own rude and serious way, showing great knowledge of the fit words, bearing up like a man, and doating over her as his "ain Ailie." "Ailie, ma woman!" "Ma ain bonnie wee dawtie!"

The end was drawing on: the golden bowl was breaking; the silver cord was fast being loosed—that *animula, blandula, vagula, hospes, comesque,* was about to flee. The body and the soul—companions for sixty years—were being sundered, and taking leave. She was walking, alone, through the valley of that shadow, into which one day we must all enter—and yet she was not alone, for we know whose rod and staff were comforting her.

One night she had fallen quiet, and, as we hoped, asleep; her eyes were shut. We put down the gas, and sat watching her. Suddenly she sat up in bed, and taking a bedgown which was lying on it rolled up, she held it eagerly to her breast—to the right side. We could see her eyes bright with a surprising tenderness and joy, bending over this bundle of clothes. She held it as a woman holds her sucking child; opening out her nightgown impatiently, and holding it close, and brooding over it, and murmuring foolish little words, as over one whom his mother comforteth, and who sucks and is satisfied. It was pitiful and strange to see her wasted dying look, keen and yet vague—her immense love.

"Preserve me!" groaned James, giving way. And then she rocked back and forward, as if to make it sleep, hushing it, and wasting on it her infinite fondness. "Wae's me, doctor; I declare she's thinkin' it's that bairn." "What bairn?" "The only bairn we ever had; our wee Mysie, and she's in the Kingdom forty years and mair." It was plainly true: the pain in the breast, telling its urgent story to a bewildered, ruined brain, was misread and mistaken; it suggested to her the uneasiness of a breast full of milk, and then the child; and so again once more they were together, and she had her ain wee Mysie in her bosom.

This was the close. She sank rapidly: the delirium left her; but, as she whispered, she was "clean silly"; it was the lightening before the final darkness. After having for some time lain still—her eyes shut, she said, "James!" He came close to her, and lifting up her calm, clear, beautiful eyes, she gave him a long look, turned to me kindly but shortly, looked for Rab but could not see him, then turned to her husband again, as if she would never leave off looking, shut her eyes, and composed herself. She lay for some time breathing quick, and passed away so gently, that when we thought she was gone, James, in his old-fashioned way, held the mirror to her face. After a long pause, one small spot of dimness was breathed out; it vanished away, and never returned, leaving the blank clear darkness without a stain. "What is our life? it is even a vapour, which appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away."

Rab all this time had been full awake and motionless: he came forward beside us: Ailie's hand, which James had held, was hanging down; it was soaked with his tears; Rab licked it all over carefully, looked at her, and returned to his place under the table.

James and I sat, I don't know how long, but for some time—saying nothing; he started up abruptly, and with some noise went to the table, and putting his right fore and middle fingers each into a shoe, pulled them out, and put them on, breaking one of the leather latchets, and muttering in anger, "I never did the like o' that afore!"

I believe he never did; nor after either. "Rab!" he said roughly, and pointing with his thumb to the bottom of the bed. Rab leapt up, and settled himself; his head and eye to the dead face. "Maister John, ye'll wait for me," said the carrier; and disappeared in the darkness, thundering downstairs in his heavy shoes. I ran to a front window: there he was, already round the house, and out at the gate, fleeing like a shadow.

I was afraid about him, and yet not afraid; so I sat down beside Rab, and being wearied, fell asleep. I awoke from a sudden noise outside. It was November, and there had been a heavy fall of snow. Rab was in *statu quo;* he heard the noise too, and plainly knew it, but never moved. I looked out; and there, at the gate, in the dim morning—for the sun was not up, was Jess and the cart—a cloud of steam rising from the old mare. I did not see James; he was already at the door, and came up the stairs, and met me. It was less than three hours since he left, and he must have posted out—who knows how?—to Howgate, full nine miles off; yoked Jess, and driven her astonished into town. He had an armful of blankets, and was streaming with perspiration. He nodded to me, spread out on the floor two pairs of clean old blankets having at their corners, "A. G., 1794," in large letters in red worsted. These were the initials of Alison Graeme, and James may have looked in at her from without—himself unseen but not unthought of—when he was "wat, wat, and weary," and after having walked many a mile over the hills, may have seen her sitting, while "a' the lave were sleepin'," and by the firelight working her name on the blankets, for her ain James's bed.

He motioned Rab down, and taking his wife in his arms, laid her in the blankets, and happed her carefully and firmly up, leaving the face uncovered; and then lifting her, he nodded again sharply to me, and with a resolved but utterly miserable face, strode along the passage, and downstairs, followed by Rab. I followed with a light; but he didn't need it. I went out, holding stupidly the candle in my hand in the calm frosty air; we were soon at the gate. I could have helped him, but I saw he was not to be meddled with, and he was strong, and did not need it. He laid her down as tenderly, as safely, as he had lifted her out ten days before—as tenderly as when he had her first in his arms when she was only "A. G.,"—sorted her, leaving that beautiful sealed face open to the heavens; and then, taking Jess by the head, he moved away. He did not notice me, neither did Rab, who presided behind the cart.

I stood till they passed through the long shadow of the College, and turned up Nicolson Street. I heard the solitary cart sound through the streets, and die away and come again; and I returned, thinking of that company going up Libberton Brae, then along Roslin Muir, the morning light touching the Pentlands, and making them like on-looking ghosts; then down the hill through Auchindinny woods, past "haunted Woodhouselee"; and as daybreak came sweeping up the bleak Lammermuirs, and fell on his own door, the company would stop, and James would take the key, and lift Ailie up again, laying her on her own bed, and, having put Jess up, would return with Rab and shut the door.

James buried his wife, with his neighbours mourning, Rab inspecting the solemnity from a distance. It was snow, and that black ragged hole would look strange in the midst of the swelling spotless cushion of white. James looked after everything; then rather suddenly fell ill, and took to bed; was insensible when the doctor came, and soon died. A sort of low fever was prevailing in the village, and his want of sleep, his exhaustion, and his misery, made him apt to take it. The grave was not difficult to re-open. A fresh fall of snow had again made all things white and smooth; Rab once more looked on, and slunk home to the stable.

And what of Rab? I asked for him next week at the new carrier who got the goodwill of James's business and was now master of Jess and her cart. "How's Rab?" He put me off, and said rather rudely, "What's *your* business wi' the dowg?" I was not to be so put off. "Where's Rab?" He, getting confused and red, and intermeddling with his hair, said, "'Deed, sir, Rab's deid." "Dead! what did he die of?" "Weel, sir," said he, getting redder, "he didna exactly dee; he was killed. I had to brain him wi' a rack-pin; there was nae doin' wi' him. He lay in the treviss wi' the mear, and wadna come oot. I tempit him wi' kail and meat, but he wad tak naething, and keepit me frae feedin' the beast, and he was aye gur gurrin', and grup gruppin' me by the legs. I was laith to make awa wi' the auld dowg, his like wasna atween this and Thornhill—but, 'deed, sir, I could do naething else." I believed him. Fit end for Rab, quick and complete. His teeth and his friends gone, why should he keep the peace, and be civil?

He was buried on the braeface, near the burn, the children of the village—his companions, who used to make very free with him and sit on his ample stomach as he lay half asleep at the door in the sun—watching the solemnity from a distance.

MRS. GASKELL

(1810–1865)

ELIZABETH CLEGHORN GASKELL was the daughter of William Stevenson, an Unitarian minister. She spent her early life at Knutsford in Cheshire, which old-world town (as it then was) supplied the background for *Cranford* (1853). This book was at once acclaimed a masterpiece of humoristic literature. Her marriage in 1832 to the Rev. William Gaskell removed her to Manchester, and there she studied the life and customs of the working-classes. Among her other works are *Mary Barton* (1848), *North and South* (1855), and *Sylvia's Lovers* (1863). Her biography of Charlotte Brontë (1857) is still widely read.

"Curious If True" is reprinted from *Cousin Phillis and Other Tales* (1865).

CURIOUS IF TRUE

(*Extract from a Letter from Richard Whittingham, Esq.*)

YOU were formerly so much amused at my pride in my descent from that sister of Calvin's who married a Whittingham, Dean of Durham, that I doubt if you will be able to enter into the regard for my distinguished relation that has led me to France, in order to examine registers and archives, which I thought might enable me to discover collateral descendants of the great Reformer, with whom I might call cousins. I shall not tell you of my troubles and adventures in this research; you are not worthy to hear of them; but something so curious befell me one evening last August, that if I had not been perfectly certain I was wide awake, I might have taken it for a dream.

For the purpose I have named, it was necessary that I should make Tours my headquarters for a time. I had traced descendants of the Calvin family out of Normandy into the centre of France; but I found it was necessary to have a kind of permission from the bishop of the diocese, before I could see certain family papers, which had fallen into the possession of the Church; and, as I had several English friends at Tours, I awaited an answer to my request from Monseigneur de ——, at that town. I was ready to accept any invitation; but I received very few, and was sometimes a little at a loss what to do with my evenings. The *table d'hôte* was at five o'clock; I did not wish to go to the expense of a private sitting-room, disliked the dinnery atmosphere of the *salle à manger*, could not play either at pool or billiards, and the aspect of my fellow-guests was unprepossessing enough to make me unwilling to enter into any *tête-à-tête* gamblings with them. So I usually rose from table early, and tried to make the most of the remaining light of the August evenings in walking briskly off to explore the surrounding country; the middle of the day was too hot for this purpose, and better employed in lounging on a bench in the Boulevards, lazily listening to the distant band, and noticing with equal laziness the faces and figures of the women who passed by.

One Thursday evening—the 18th of August it was, I think—I had gone further than usual in my walk, and I found that it was later than I had imagined when I paused to turn back. I fancied I could make a round; I had enough notion of the direction in which I was to see that, by turning up a narrow straight lane to my left, I should shorten my way back to Tours. And so I believe I should have done, could I have found an outlet at the right place; but field-paths are almost unknown in that part of France, and my lane, stiff and straight as any street, and marked into terribly vanishing perspective by the regular row of poplars on each side, seemed interminable. Of course night came on, and I was in darkness. In England I might have had a chance of seeing a light in some cottage only a field or two off, and asking my way from the inhabitants; but here I could see no such welcome sight; indeed, I believe French peasants go to bed with the summer daylight; so, if there were any habitations in the neighbourhood, I never saw them. At last—I believe I must have walked two hours in the darkness—I saw the dusky outline of a wood on one side of the weariful lane; and, impatiently careless of all forest laws and penalties for trespassers, I made my way to it, thinking that, if the worst came to the worst, I could find some covert—some shelter where I could lie down and rest, until the morning light gave me a chance of finding my way back to Tours. But the plantation, on the outskirts of what appeared to me a dense wood, was of young trees, too closely-planted to be more than slender stems growing up to a good height, with scanty foliage on their summits. On I went towards the thicker forest; and, once there, I slackened my pace, and began to look about me for a good lair. I was as dainty as Lochiel's grandchild, who made his grandsire indignant at the luxury of his pillow of snow: this brake was too full of brambles, that felt damp with dew; there was no hurry, since I had given up all hope of passing the night between four walls; and I went leisurely groping about, and trusting that there were no wolves to be poked up out of their summer drowsiness by my stick—when, all at once, I saw a *château* before me, not a quarter of a mile off, at the end of what seemed to be an ancient avenue (now overgrown and irregular), which I happened to be crossing, when I looked to my right and saw the welcome sight. Large, stately, and dark was its outline against the dusky night-sky; there were pepper-boxes, and *tourelles*, and what not, fantastically growing up into the dim starlight. And, more to the purpose still, though I could not see the details of the building that I was now facing, it was plain enough that there were lights in many windows, as if some great entertainment was going on.

"They are hospitable people, at any rate," thought I. "Perhaps they will give me a bed. I don't suppose French *propriétaires* have traps and horses quite as plentiful as English country-gentlemen; but they are evidently having a large party, and some of their guests may be from Tours, and will give me a cast back to the 'Lion d'Or.' I am not proud, and I am dog-tired. I am not above hanging on behind, if need be."

So, putting a little briskness and spirit into my walk, I went up to the door, which was standing open, most hospitably, and showing a large lighted hall, all hung round with spoils of the chase, armour, etc., the details of which I had not time to notice; for the instant I stood on the threshold a huge porter appeared, in a strange, old-fashioned dress—a kind of livery which well befitted the general appearance of the house. He asked me, in French (so curiously pronounced that I thought I had hit upon a new kind of *patois*), my name, and whence I came. I thought he would not be much the wiser—still, it was but civil to give it before I made my request for assistance; so, in reply, I said:

"My name is Whittingham—Richard Whittingham, an English gentleman, staying at ——." To my infinite surprise, a light of pleased intelligence came over the giant's face; he made me a low bow, and said (still in the same curious dialect) that I was welcome, that I was long expected.

"Long expected!" What could the fellow mean? Had I stumbled on a nest of relations by John Calvin's side, who had heard of my genealogical inquiries, and were gratified and interested by them? But I was too much pleased to be under shelter for the night to think it necessary to account for my agreeable reception before I enjoyed it. Just as he was opening the great heavy *battants* of the door that led from the hall to the interior, he turned round and said:

"Apparently Monsieur le Géanquilleur is not come with you?"

"No! I am all alone. I have lost my way"—and I was going on with my explanation, when he, as if quite indifferent to it, led the way up a great stone staircase, as wide as many rooms, and having on each landing-place massive iron wickets in a heavy framework; these the porter unlocked with the solemn slowness of age. Indeed, a strange, mysterious awe of the centuries that had passed away since this *château* was built, came over me, as I waited for the turning of the ponderous keys in the ancient locks. I could almost have fancied that I heard a mighty rushing murmur (like the ceaseless sound of a distant sea, ebbing and flowing for ever and for ever), coming forth from the great vacant galleries that opened out on each side of the broad staircase, and were to be dimly perceived in the darkness above us. It was as if the voices of generations of men yet echoed and eddied in the silent air. It was strange, too, that my friend the porter going before me, ponderously infirm, with his feeble old hands striving in vain to keep the tall flambeau he held steadily before him—strange, I say, that he was the only domestic I saw in the vast halls and passages, or met with on the grand staircase. At length, we stood before the gilded doors that led into the saloon where the family—or it might be the company, so great was the buzz of voices—was assembled. I would have remonstrated, when I found he was going to introduce me, dusty and travel-smeared, in a morning costume that was not even my best, into this grand *salon*, with nobody knew how many ladies and gentlemen assembled; but the obstinate old man was evidently bent upon taking me straight to his master, and paid no heed to my words.

The doors flew open; and I was ushered into a saloon curiously full of pale light, which did not culminate on any spot, nor proceed from any centre, nor flicker with any motion of the air, but filled every nook and corner, making all things deliciously distinct; different from our light of gas or candle, as is the difference between a clear southern atmosphere and that of our misty England.

At the first moment, my arrival excited no attention, the apartment was so full of people, all intent on their own conversation. But my friend the porter went up to a handsome lady of middle age, richly attired in that antique manner which fashion has brought round again of late years, and, waiting first in an attitude of deep respect till her attention fell upon him, told her my name and something about me, as far as I could guess from the gestures of the one and the sudden glance of the eye of the other.

She immediately came towards me with the most friendly actions of greeting, even before she had advanced near enough to speak. Then—and was it not strange?—her words and accent were those of the commonest peasant of the country. Yet she herself looked high-bred, and would have been dignified, had she been a shade less restless; had her countenance worn a little less lively and inquisitive expression. I had been poking a good deal about the old parts of Tours, and had had to understand the dialect of the people who dwelt in the Marché au Vendredi and similar places; or I really should not have understood my handsome hostess as she offered to present me to her husband, a henpecked, gentlemanly man, who was more quaintly attired than she in the very extreme of that style of dress. I thought to myself that in France, as in England, it is the provincials who carry fashion to such an excess as to become ridiculous.

However, he spoke (still in the *patois*) of his pleasure in making my acquaintance, and led me to a strange uneasy easy-chair, much of a piece with the rest of the furniture, which might have taken its place without any anachronism by the side of that in the Hôtel Cluny. Then again began the clatter of French voices, which my arrival had for an instant interrupted, and I had leisure to look about me. Opposite to me sat a very sweet-looking lady, who must have been a great beauty in her youth, I should think, and would be charming in old age, from the sweetness of her countenance. She was, however, extremely fat, and, on seeing her feet laid up before her on a cushion, I at once perceived that they were so swollen as to render her incapable of walking, which probably brought on her excessive *embonpoint.* Her hands were plump and small, but rather coarse-grained in texture, not quite so clean as they might have been, and altogether not so aristocratic-looking as the charming face. Her dress was of superb black velvet, ermine-trimmed, with diamonds thrown all abroad over it.

Not far from her stood the least little man I had ever seen, of such admirable proportions no one could call him a dwarf, because with that word we usually associate something of deformity; but yet with an elfin look of shrewd, hard, worldly wisdom in his face that marred the impression which his delicate regular little features would otherwise have conveyed. Indeed, I do not think he was quite of equal rank with the rest of the company, for his dress was inappropriate to the occasion (and he apparently was an invited, while I was an involuntary, guest;) and one or two of his gestures and actions were more like the tricks of an uneducated rustic than anything else. To explain what I mean: his boots had evidently seen much service, and had been re-topped, re-heeled, re-soled to the extent of cobbler's powers. Why should he have come in them if they were not his best—his only pair? And what can be more ungenteel than poverty! Then, again, he had an uneasy trick of putting his hand up to his throat, as if he expected to find something the matter with it; and he had the awkward habit—which I do not think he could have copied from Dr. Johnson, because most probably he had never heard of him—of trying always to retrace his steps on the exact boards on which he had trodden to arrive at any particular part of the room. Besides, to settle the question, I once heard him addressed as Monsieur Poucet, without any aristocratic "de" for a prefix; and nearly everyone else in the room was a marquis, at any rate.

I say "nearly everyone," for some strange people had the *entrée;* unless, indeed, they were, like me, benighted. One of the guests I should have taken for a servant, but for the extraordinary influence he seemed to have over the man I took for his master, and who never did anything without, apparently, being urged thereto by this follower. The master, magnificently dressed, but ill at ease in his clothes, as if they had been made for someone else, was a weak-looking, handsome man, continually sauntering about, and, I almost guessed, an object of suspicion to some of the gentlemen present; which, perhaps, drove him on the companionship of his follower, who was dressed something in the style of an ambassador's chasseur; yet it was not a chasseur's dress after all; it was something more thoroughly old-world; boots half-way up his ridiculously small legs, which clattered as he walked along, as if they were too large for his little feet; and a great quantity of grey fur, as trimming to coat, court-mantle, boots, cap—everything. You know the way in which certain countenances remind you perpetually of some animal, be it bird or beast! Well, this chasseur (as I will call him, for want of a better name) was exceedingly like the great tomcat that you have seen so often in my chambers, and laughed at, almost as often, for his uncanny gravity of demeanour. Grey whiskers has my Tom—grey whiskers had the chasseur; grey hair overshadows the upper lip of my Tom—grey mustachios hid that of the chasseur. The pupils of Tom's eyes dilate and contract as I had thought cat's pupils only could do, until I saw those of the chasseur. To be sure, canny as Tom is, the chasseur had the advantage in the more intelligent expression. He seemed to have obtained most complete sway over his master or patron, whose looks he watched, and whose steps he followed, with a kind of distrustful interest that puzzled me greatly.

There were several other groups in the more distant part of the saloon, all of the stately old school, all grand and noble, I conjectured from their bearing. They seemed perfectly well acquainted with each other, as if they were in the habit of meeting. But I was interrupted in my observations by the tiny little gentleman on the opposite side of the room coming across to take a place beside me. It is no difficult matter to a Frenchman to slide into conversation; and so gracefully did my pigmy friend keep up the character of the nation, that we were almost confidential before ten minutes had elapsed.

Now I was quite aware that the welcome which all had extended to me, from the porter up to the vivacious lady and meek lord of the castle, was intended for some other person. But it required either a degree of moral courage, of which I cannot boast, or the self-reliance and conversational powers of a bolder and cleverer man than I, to undeceive people who had fallen into so fortunate a mistake for me. Yet the little man by my side insinuated himself so much into my confidence that I had half a mind to tell him of my exact situation, and to turn him into a friend and an ally.

"Madame is perceptibly growing older," said he in the midst of my perplexity, glancing at our hostess.

"Madame is still a very fine woman," replied I.

"Now, is it not strange," continued he, lowering his voice, "how women almost invariably praise the absent, or departed, as if they were angels of light? while, as for the present, or the living"—here he shrugged up his little shoulders and made an expressive pause. "Would you believe it! Madame is always praising her late husband to monsieur's face; till, in fact, we guests are quite perplexed how to look: for, you know, the late M. de Retz's character was quite notorious—everybody has heard of him." All the world of Touraine, thought I; but I made an assenting noise.

At this instant, monsieur our host came up to me, and, with a civil look of tender interest (such as some people put on when they inquire after your mother, about whom they do not care one straw), asked if I had heard lately how my cat was? "How my cat was!" What could the man mean? My cat! Could he mean the tailless Tom, born in the Isle of Man, and now supposed to be keeping guard against the incursions of rats and mice into my chambers in London? Tom is, as you know, on pretty good terms with some of my friends, using their legs for rubbing-posts without scruple, and highly esteemed by them for his gravity of demeanour, and wise manner of winking his eyes. But could his fame have reached across the Channel? However, an answer must be returned to the inquiry, as monsieur's face was bent down to mine with a look of polite anxiety; so I, in my turn, assumed an expression of gratitude, and assured him that, to the best of my belief, my cat was in remarkably good health.

"And the climate agrees with her?"

"Perfectly," said I, in a maze of wonder at this deep solicitude in a tailless cat, who had lost one foot and half an ear in some cruel trap. My host smiled a sweet smile, and, addressing a few words to my little neighbour, passed on.

"How wearisome those aristocrats are!" quoth my neighbour, with a slight sneer. "Monsieur's conversation rarely extends to more than two sentences to any one. By that time his faculties are exhausted, and he needs the refreshment of silence. You and I, monsieur, are, at any rate, indebted to our own wits for our rise in the world!"

Here again I was bewildered! As you know, I am rather proud of my descent from families which, if not noble themselves, are allied to nobility; and as to my "rise in the world"—if I had risen, it would have been rather for balloon-like qualities than for mother-wit, being unincumbered with heavy ballast either in my head or my pockets. However, it was my cue to agree; so I smiled again.

"For my part," said he, "if a man does not stick at trifles; if he knows how to judiciously add to, or withhold facts, and is not sentimental in his parade of humanity, he is sure to do well; sure to affix a *de* or *von* to his name, and end his days in comfort. There is an example of what I am saying"—and he glanced furtively at the weak-looking master of the sharp, intelligent servant, whom I have called the chasseur.

"Monsieur le Marquis would never have been anything but a miller's son, if it had not been for the talents of his servant. Of course you know his antecedents?"

I was going to make some remarks on the changes in the order of the peerage since the days of Louis XVI—going, in fact, to be very sensible and historical—when there was a slight commotion among the people at the other end of the room. Lacqueys in quaint liveries must have come in from behind the tapestry, I suppose (for I never saw them enter, though I sate right opposite to the doors), and were handing about the slight beverages with slighter viands which are considered sufficient refreshments, but which looked rather meagre to my hungry appetite. These footmen were standing solemnly opposite to a lady—beautiful, splendid as the dawn, but—sound asleep in a magnificent settee. A gentleman, who showed so much irritation at her ill-timed slumbers, that I think he must have been her husband, was trying to awaken her with actions not far removed from shakings. All in vain; she was quite unconscious of his annoyance, or the smiles of the company, or the automatic solemnity of the waiting footman, or the perplexed anxiety of monsieur and madame.

My little friend sat down with a sneer, as if his curiosity was quenched in contempt.

"Moralists would make an infinity of wise remarks on that scene," said he. "In the first place, note the ridiculous position into which their superstitious reverence for rank and title puts all these people. Because monsieur is a reigning prince over some minute principality, the exact situation of which no one has as yet discovered, no one must venture to take their glass of *eau sucré* till Madame la Princesse awakens; and, judging from past experience, those poor lacqueys may have to stand for a century before that happens. Next—always speaking as a moralist, you will observe—note how difficult it is to break off bad habits acquired in youth!"

Just then the prince succeeded, by what means I did not see, in awakening the beautiful sleeper. But, at first, she did not remember where she was; and, looking up at her husband with loving eyes, she smiled, and said:

"Is it you, my prince?"

But he was too conscious of the suppressed amusement of the spectators, and his own consequent annoyance, to be reciprocally tender, and turned away with some little French expression, best rendered into English by "Pooh, pooh, my dear!"

After I had had a glass of delicious wine of some unknown quality, my courage was in rather better plight than before, and I told my cynical little neighbour—whom I must say I was beginning to dislike—that I had lost my way in the wood, and had arrived at the *château* quite by mistake.

He seemed mightily amused at my story; said that the same thing had happened to himself more than once; and told me that I had better luck than he had on one of these occasions, when, from his account, he must have been in considerable danger of his life. He ended his story by making me admire his boots, which he said he still wore, patched though they were, and all their excellent quality lost by patching, because they were of such a first-rate make for long pedestrian excursions. "Though, indeed," he wound up by saying, "the new fashion of railroads would seem to supersede the necessity for this description of boots."

When I consulted him as to whether I ought to make myself known to my host and hostess as a benighted traveller, instead of the guest whom they had taken me for, he exclaimed, "By no means! I hate such squeamish morality." And he seemed much offended by my innocent question, as if it seemed by implication to condemn something in himself. He was offended and silent; and just at this moment I caught the sweet, attractive eyes of the lady opposite—that lady whom I named at first as being no longer in the bloom of youth, but as being somewhat infirm about the feet, which were supported on a raised cushion before her. Her looks seemed to say, "Come here, and let us have some conversation together"; and, with a bow of silent excuse to my little companion, I went across to the lame old lady. She acknowledged my coming with the prettiest gesture of thanks possible; and, half-apologetically, said: "It is a little dull to be unable to move about on such evenings as this; but it is a just punishment to me for my early vanities. My poor feet, that were by nature so small, are now taking their revenge for my cruelty in forcing them into such little slippers. . . . Besides, monsieur," with a pleasant smile, "I thought it was possible you might be weary of the malicious sayings of your little neighbour. He has not borne the best character in his youth, and such men are sure to be cynical in their old age."

"Who is he?" asked I, with English abruptness.

"His name is Poucet, and his father was, I believe, a wood-cutter, or charcoal-burner, or something of the sort. They do tell sad stories of connivance at murder, ingratitude, and obtaining money on false pretences—but you will think me as bad as he if I go on with my slanders. Rather let us admire the lovely lady coming up towards us, with the roses in her hand—I never see her without roses, they are so closely connected with her past history, as you are doubtless aware. Ah, beauty!" said my companion to the lady, drawing near to us, "it is like you to come to me, now that I can no longer go to you." Then, turning to me, and gracefully drawing me into the conversation, she said, "You must know that, although we never met until we were both married, we have been almost like sisters ever since. There have been so many points of resemblance in our circumstances, and I think I may say in our characters. We had each two elder sisters—mine were but half-sisters, though—who were not so kind to us as they might have been."

"But have been sorry for it since," put in the other lady.

"Since we have married princes," continued the same lady, with an arch smile that had nothing of unkindness in it—"for we both have married far above our original stations in life—we are both unpunctual in our habits; and, in consequence of this failing of ours, we have both had to suffer mortification and pain."

"And both are charming," said a whisper close behind me. "My lord the marquis, say it—say, 'And both are charming.' "

"And both are charming," was spoken aloud by another voice. I turned, and saw the wily, catlike chasseur prompting his master to make civil speeches.

The ladies bowed, with that kind of haughty acknowledgment which shows that compliments from such a source are distasteful. But our trio of conversation was broken up, and I was sorry for it. The marquis looked as if he had been stirred up to make that one speech, and hoped that he would not be expected to say more; while behind him stood the chasseur, half-impertinent and half-servile in his ways and attitudes. The ladies, who were real ladies, seemed to be sorry for the awkwardness of the marquis, and addressed some trifling questions to him, adapting themselves to the subjects on which he could have no trouble in answering. The chasseur, meanwhile, was talking to himself in a growling tone of voice. I had fallen a little into the background at this interruption in a conversation which promised to be so pleasant, and I could not help hearing his words.

"Really, De Carabas grows more stupid every day. I have a great mind to throw off his boots, and leave him to his fate. I was intended for a court, and to a court I will go, and make my own fortune as I have made his. The emperor will appreciate my talents."

And such are the habits of the French, or such his forgetfulness of good manners in his anger, that he spat right and left on the parquetted floor.

Just then a very ugly, very pleasant-looking man, came towards the two ladies to whom I had lately been speaking, leading up to them a delicate, fair woman, dressed all in the softest white, as if she were *vouée au blanc*. I do not think there was a bit of colour about her. I thought I had heard her making, as she came along, a little noise of pleasure, not exactly like the singing of a teakettle, nor yet like the cooing of a dove, but reminding me of each sound.

"Madame de Mioumiou was anxious to see you," said he, addressing the lady with the roses, "so I have brought her across to give you a pleasure!" What an honest, good face! but oh! how ugly! And yet I liked his ugliness better than most persons' beauty. There was a look of pathetic acknowledgment of his ugliness, and a deprecation of your too hasty judgment, in his countenance, that was positively winning. The soft, white lady kept glancing at my neighbour the chasseur, as if they had had some former acquaintance; which puzzled me very much, as they were of such different rank. However, their nerves were evidently strung to the same tune; for at a sound behind the tapestry, which was more like the scuttering of rats and mice than anything else, both Madame de Mioumiou and the chasseur started with the most eager look of anxiety on their countenances, and by their restless movements—madame's panting, and the fiery dilation of his eyes—one might see that commonplace sounds affected them both in a manner very different to the rest of the company. The ugly husband of the lovely lady with the roses now addressed himself to me:

"We are much disappointed," he said, "in finding that Monsieur is not accompanied by his countryman—le grand Jean d'Angleterre; I cannot pronounce his name rightly"—and he looked at me to help him out.

" 'Le grand Jean d'Angleterre!' " now, who was 'le grand Jean d'Angleterre'? John Bull? John Russell? John Bright?

"Jean—Jean"—continued the gentleman, seeing my embarrassment. "Ah, these terrible English names—'Jean de Géanquilleur!' "

I was as wise as ever. And yet the name struck me as familiar, but slightly disguised. I repeated it to myself. It was mighty like John the Giant-killer; only his friends always called that worthy "Jack." I said the name aloud.

"Ah, that is it!" said he. "But why has he not accompanied you to our little *réunion* to-night?"

I had been rather puzzled once or twice before, but this serious question added considerably to my perplexity. Jack the Giant-killer had once, it is true, been rather an intimate friend of mine, as far as (printer's) ink and paper can keep up a friendship, but I had not heard his name mentioned for years; and for aught I knew he lay enchanted with King Arthur's knights, who lie entranced, until the blast of the trumpets of four mighty kings shall call them to help at England's need. But the question had been asked in serious earnest by that gentleman, whom I more wished to think well of me than I did any other person in the room. So I answered respectfully, that it was long since I had heard anything of my countryman; but that I was sure it would have given him as much pleasure as it was doing myself to have been present at such an agreeable gathering of friends. He bowed, and then the lame lady took up the word.

"To-night is the night, when, of all the year, this great old forest surrounding the castle is said to be haunted by the phantom of a little peasant-girl who once lived hereabouts; the tradition is that she was devoured by a wolf. In former days I have seen her on this night out of yonder window at the end of the gallery. Will you, *ma belle*, take monsieur to see the view outside by the moonlight (you may possibly see the phantom-child); and leave me to a little *tête-à-tête* with your husband?"

With a gentle movement the lady with the roses complied with the other's request, and we went to a great window, looking down on the forest, in which I had lost my way. The tops of the far-spreading and leafy trees lay motionless beneath us in that pale, wan light, which shows objects almost as distinct in form, though not in colour, as by day. We looked down on the countless avenues which seemed to converge from all quarters to the great old castle; and suddenly across one, quite near to us, there passed the figure of a little girl with the *capuchon* on, that takes the place of a peasant girl's bonnet in France. She had a basket on one arm, and by her, on the side to which her head was turned, there went a wolf. I could almost have said it was licking her hand, as if in penitent love, if either penitence or love had ever been a quality of wolves; but though not of living, perhaps it may be of phantom wolves.

"There, we have seen her!" exclaimed my beautiful companion. "Though so long dead, her simple story of household goodness and trustful simplicity still lingers in the hearts of all who have ever heard of her; and the country-people about here say that seeing the phantom-child on this anniversary brings good luck for the year. Let us hope that we shall share in the traditionary good fortune! Ah! here is Madame de Retz—she retains the name of her first husband, you know, as he was of higher rank than the present." We were joined by our hostess.

"If monsieur is fond of the beauties of nature and art," said she, perceiving that I had been looking at the view from the great window, "he will perhaps take pleasure in seeing the picture." Here she sighed, with a little affectation of grief. "You know the picture I allude to?" addressing my companion, who bowed assent and smiled a little maliciously, as I followed the lead of madame.

I went after her to the other end of the saloon, noting by the way with what keen curiosity she caught up what was passing either in word or action on each side of her. When we stood opposite to the end-wall, I perceived a full-length picture of a handsome, peculiar-looking man, with—in spite of his good looks—a very fierce and scowling expression. My hostess clasped her hands together as her arms hung down in front, and sighed once more. Then, half in soliloquy, she said:

"He was the love of my youth; his stern, yet manly character first touched this heart of mine. When—when shall I cease to deplore his loss?"

Not being acquainted with her enough to answer this question (if indeed it were not sufficiently answered by the fact of her second marriage), I felt awkward; and, by way of saying something, I remarked:

"The countenance strikes me as resembling something I have seen before—in an engraving from an historical picture, I think; only, it is there the principal figure in a group; he is holding a lady by her hair, and threatening her with his scimitar, while two cavaliers are rushing up the stairs, apparently only just in time to save her life."

"Alas, alas!" said she, "you too accurately describe a miserable passage in my life, which has often been represented in a false light. The best of husbands"—here she sobbed, and became slightly inarticulate with her grief—"will sometimes be displeased. I was young and curious—he was justly angry with my disobedience—my brothers were too hasty—the consequence is, I became a widow."

After due respect for her tears, I ventured to suggest some commonplace consolation. She turned round sharply:

"No, monsieur; my only comfort is that I have never forgiven the brothers who interfered so cruelly, in such an uncalled-for manner, between my dear husband and myself. To quote my friend, Monsieur Sganarelle—'Ce sont les petites choses qui sont de temps en temps nécessaires dans l'amitié; et cinq ou six coups d'épée entre gens qui s'aiment ne font que ragaillardir l'affection.' You observe, the colouring is not quite what it should be."

"In this light the beard is of rather a peculiar tint," said I.

"Yes; the painter did not do it justice. It was most lovely, and gave him such a distinguished air, quite different from the common herd. Stay, I will show you the exact colour, if you will come near this flambeau!" And going near the light, she took off a bracelet of hair, with a magnificent clasp of pearls. It was peculiar, certainly. I did not know what to say. "His precious, lovely beard!" said she. "And the pearls go so well with the delicate blue!"

Her husband, who had come up to us, and waited till her eye fell upon him before venturing to speak, now said, "It is strange Monsieur Ogre is not yet arrived!"

"Not at all strange," said she tartly. "He was always very stupid, and constantly falls into mistakes, in which he comes worse off; and it is very well he does, for he is a credulous and cowardly fellow. Not at all strange! If you will"—turning to her husband, so that I hardly heard her words, until I caught: "Then everybody would have their rights, and we should have no more trouble. Is it not, monsieur?" addressing me.

"If I were in England, I should imagine madame was speaking of the Reform Bill, or the millennium; but I am in ignorance."

And, just as I spoke, the great folding doors were thrown open wide; and every one started to their feet, to greet a little old lady, leaning on a thin black wand—and—

"Madame la Fée-marraine," was announced by a chorus of sweet shrill voices.

And in a moment I was lying in the grass close by a hollow oak-tree, with the slanting glory of the dawning day shining full in my face, and thousands of little birds and delicate insects piping and warbling out their welcome to the ruddy splendour.

W. M. THACKERAY

(1811–1863)

WILLIAM MAKEPEACE THACKERAY was intended for the bar, but on coming of age abandoned his legal studies. He turned to literature, and soon became an important contributor to *Fraser's Magazine* and other periodicals. *The Yellowplush Papers* (1837) was a success. *The Great Hoggarty Diamond* appeared four years later. His first really important work was that admirable piece of irony, *Barry Lyndon* (1844). When this was brought out his *Snobs of England* (1846–7) had made him a leading member of the staff of *Punch.* He had now definitely arrived, and he now shared with Dickens the novelist's throne. In quick succession came *Vanity Fair* (1847–8), *Pendennis* (1848–50), *Esmond* (1852), *The Newcomes* (1853–5), and *The Virginians* (1857–9). Most of these works, and many others of his writing, were illustrated by him.

"Dennis Haggarty's Wife" is reprinted from *Men's Wives* (1843).

DENNIS HAGGARTY'S WIFE

THERE was an odious Irishwoman and her daughter who used to frequent the Royal Hotel at Leamington some years ago, and who went by the name of Mrs. Major Gam. Gam had been a distinguished officer in his Majesty's service, whom nothing but death and his own amiable wife could overcome. The widow mourned her husband in the most becoming bombasine she could muster, and had at least half an inch of lamp-black round the immense visiting tickets which she left at the houses of the nobility and gentry her friends.

Some of us, I am sorry to say, used to call her Mrs. Major Gammon; for if the worthy widow had a propensity, it was to talk largely of herself and family (of her own family, for she held her husband's very cheap), and of the wonders of her paternal mansion, Molloyville, County of Mayo. She was of the Molloys of that county; and though I never heard of the family before, I have little doubt, from what Mrs. Major Gam stated, that they were the most ancient and illustrious family of that part of Ireland. I remember there came down to see his aunt a young fellow with huge red whiskers and tight nankeens, a green coat and an awful breastpin, who, after two days' stay at the Spa, proposed marriage to Miss S——, or, in default, a duel with her father; and who drove a flash curricle with a bay and a grey, and who was presented with much pride by Mrs. Gam as Castlereagh Molloy of Molloyville. We all agreed that he was the most insufferable snob of the whole season, and were delighted when a bailiff came down in search of him.

Well, this is all I know personally of the Molloyville family; but at the house if you met the Widow Gam, and talked on any subject in life, you were sure to hear of it. If you asked her to have peas at dinner, she would say, "Oh, sir, after the peas at Molloyville, I really don't care for any others—do I, dearest Jemima? We always had a dish in the month of June, when my father gave his head gardener a guinea (we had three at Molloyville), and sent him with his compliments and a quart of peas to our neighbour, dear Lord Marrowfat. What a sweet place Marrowfat Park is! isn't it, Jemima?" If a carriage passed by the window, Mrs. Major Gammon would be sure to tell you that there were three carriages at Molloyville, "the barouche, the chawiot, and the covered cyar." In the same manner she would favour you with the number and names of the footmen of the establishment; and on a visit to Warwick Castle (for this bustling woman made one in every party of pleasure that was formed from the hotel), she gave us to understand that the great walk by the river was altogether inferior to the principal avenue of Molloyville Park. I should not have been able to tell so much about Mrs. Gam and her daughter, but that, between ourselves, I was particularly sweet upon a young lady at the time, whose papa lived at the Royal, and was under the care of Dr. Jephson.

The Jemima appealed to by Mrs. Gam in the above sentence was, of course, her daughter, apostrophised by her mother, "Jemima, my soul's darling!" or, "Jemima, my blessed child!" or, "Jemima, my own love!" The sacrifices that Mrs. Gam had made for that daughter were, she said, astonishing. The money she had spent in masters upon her, the illnesses through which she had nursed her, the ineffable love the mother bore her, were only known to Heaven, Mrs. Gam said. They used to come into the room with their arms round each other's waists: at dinner between the courses the mother would sit with one hand locked in her daughter's; and if only two or three young men were present at the time, would be pretty sure to kiss her Jemima more than once during the time whilst the bohea was poured out.

As for Miss Gam, if she was not handsome, candour forbids me to say she was ugly. She was neither one nor t'other. She was a person who wore ringlets and a band round her forehead; she knew four songs, which became rather tedious at the end of a couple of months' acquaintance; she had excessively bare shoulders; she inclined to wear numbers of cheap ornaments, rings, brooches, *ferronières*, smelling-bottles, and was always, we thought, very smartly dressed, though old Mrs. Lynx hinted that her gowns and her mother's were turned over and over again, and that her eyes were almost put out by darning stockings.

These eyes—Miss Gam had very large, though rather red and weak, and used to roll them about at every eligible unmarried man in the place. But though the widow subscribed to all the balls, though she hired a fly to go to the meet of the hounds, though she was constant at church, and Jemima sang louder than any person there except the clerk, and though, probably, any person who made her a happy husband would be invited down to enjoy the three footmen, gardeners, and carriages at Molloyville, yet no English gentleman was found sufficiently audacious to propose. Old Lynx used to say that the pair had been at Tunbridge, Harrogate, Brighton, Ramsgate, Cheltenham, for this eight years past, where they had met, it seemed, with no better fortune. Indeed, the widow looked rather high for her blessed child; and as she looked with the contempt which no small number of Irish people feel upon all persons who get their bread by labour or commerce; and as she was a person whose energetic manners, costume, and brogue, were not much to the taste of quiet English country gentlemen, Jemima—sweet, spotless flower—still remained on her hands, a thought withered, perhaps, and seedy.

Now, at this time, the 120th regiment was quartered at Weedon Barracks, and with the corps was a certain Assistant-Surgeon Haggarty, a large, lean, tough, raw-boned man, with big hands, knock-knees, and carroty whiskers, and, withal, as honest a creature as ever handled a lancet. Haggarty, as his name imports, was of the very same nation as Mrs. Gam, and, what is more, the honest fellow had some of the peculiarities which belonged to the widow, and bragged about his family almost as much as she did. I do not know of what particular part of Ireland they were kings, but monarchs they must have been, as have been the ancestors of so many thousand Hibernian families;

but they had been men of no small consideration in Dublin, "Where my father," Haggarty said, "is as well known as King William's statue, and where he 'rowls his carriage, too,' let me tell ye."

Hence Haggarty was called by the wags "Rowl the carriage," and several of them made inquiries of Mrs. Gam regarding him: "Mrs. Gam, when you used to go up from Molloyville to the Lord Lieutenant's balls, and had your town-house in Fitzwilliam Square, used you to meet the famous Doctor Haggarty in society?"

"Is it Surgeon Haggarty of Gloucester Street ye mean? The black Papist! D'ye suppose that the Molloys would sit down to table with a creature of that sort?"

"Why, isn't he the most famous physician in Dublin, and doesn't he 'rowl his carriage' there?"

"The horrid wretch! He keeps a shop, I tell ye, and sends his sons out with the medicine. He's got four of them off into the army, Ulick and Phil, and Terence and Denny, and now it's Charles that takes out the physic. But how should I know about these odious creatures? Their mother was a Burke of Burke's Town, County Cavan, and brought Sergeant Haggarty two thousand pounds. She was a Protestant; and I am surprised how she could have taken up with a horrid, odious, Popish apothecary!"

From the extent of the widow's information, I am led to suppose that the inhabitants of Dublin are not less anxious about their neighbours than are the natives of English cities; and I think it is very probable that Mrs. Gam's account of the young Haggarties who carried out the medicine is perfectly correct, for a lad in the 120th made a caricature of Haggarty coming out of a chemist's shop with an oilcloth basket under his arm, which set the worthy surgeon in such a fury that there would have been a duel between him and the ensign, could the fiery doctor have had his way.

Now, Dionysius Haggarty was of an exceedingly inflammable temperament, and it chanced that of all the invalids, the visitors, the young squires of Warwickshire, the young manufacturers from Birmingham, the young officers from the barracks, it chanced unluckily for Miss Gam and himself, that he was the only individual who was in the least smitten by her personal charms. He was very tender and modest about his love, however, for it must be owned that he respected Mrs. Gam hugely, and fully admitted, like a good simple fellow as he was, the superiority of that lady's birth and breeding to his own. How could he hope that he, a humble assistant-surgeon, with a thousand pounds his aunt Kitty left him for all his fortune,—how could he hope that one of the race of Molloyville would ever condescend to marry him?

Inflamed, however, by love, and inspired by wine, one day at a picnic at Kenilworth, Haggarty, whose love and raptures were the talk of the whole regiment, was induced by his waggish comrades to make a proposal in form.

"Are you aware, Mr. Haggarty, that you are speaking to a Molloy?" was all the reply majestic Mrs. Gam made when, according to the usual formula, the fluttering Jemima referred her suitor to "mamma." She left him with a look which was meant to crush the poor fellow to earth, she gathered up her cloak and bonnet, and precipitately called for her fly. She took care to tell every single soul in Leamington that the son of the odious Papist apothecary had had the audacity to propose for her daughter (indeed a proposal, coming from whatever quarter it may, does no harm), and left Haggarty in a state of extreme depression and despair.

His downheartedness, indeed, surprised most of his acquaintances in and out of the regiment, for the young lady was no beauty and a doubtful fortune, and Dennis was a man outwardly of an unromantic turn, who seemed to have a great deal more liking for beefsteak and whisky-punch than for women, however fascinating.

But there is no doubt this shy, uncouth, rough fellow had a warmer and more faithful heart hid within him than many a dandy who is as handsome as Apollo. I, for my part, never can understand why a man falls in love, and heartily give him credit for so doing, never mind with what or whom. *That* I take to be a point quite as much beyond an individual's own control as the catching of the small-pox or the colour of his hair. To the surprise of all, Assistant-Surgeon Dionysius Haggarty was deeply and seriously in love; and I am told that one day he very nearly killed the before-mentioned young ensign with a carving-knife, for venturing to make a second caricature, representing Lady Gammon and Jemima in a fantastical park, surrounded by three gardeners, three carriages, three footmen, and the covered "cyar." He would have no joking concerning them. He became moody and quarrelsome of habit. He was for some time much more in the surgery and hospital than in the mess. He gave up the eating, for the most part, of those vast quantities of beef and pudding, for which his stomach had used to afford such ample and swift accommodation; and when the cloth was drawn, instead of taking twelve tumblers, and singing Irish melodies, as he used to do, in a horrible cracked yelling voice, he would retire to his own apartment or gloomily pace the barrack-yard, or madly whip and spur a grey mare he had on the road to Leamington where his Jemima (although invisible for him) still dwelt.

The season at Leamington coming to a conclusion by the withdrawal of the young fellows who frequented that watering-place, the Widow Gam retired to her usual quarters for the other months of the year.

Where these quarters were, I think we have no right to ask, for I believe she had quarrelled with her brother at Molloyville, and besides, was a great deal too proud to be a burden on anybody.

Not only did the widow quit Leamington, but very soon afterwards the 120th received its marching orders, and left Weedon and Warwickshire. Haggarty's appetite was by this time partially restored, but his love was not altered and his humour was still morose and gloomy. I am informed that at this period of his life he wrote some poems relative to his unhappy passion, a wild set of verses of several lengths, and in his handwriting, being discovered upon a sheet of paper in which a pitch-plaster was wrapt up, which Lieutenant and Adjutant Wheezer was compelled to put on for a cold.

Fancy, then, three years afterwards, the surprise of all Haggarty's acquaintances on reading in the public papers the following announcement:

> Married, at Monkstown on the 12th instant, Dionysius Haggarty, Esq., of H.M. 120th Foot, to Jemima Amelia Wilhelmina Molloy, daughter of the late Major Lancelot Gam, R.M., and granddaughter of the late, and niece of the present Burke Bodkin Blake Molloy, Esq., Molloyville, County Mayo.

Has the course of true love at last begun to run smooth? thought I, as I laid down the paper; and the old times, and the old leering, bragging widow, and the high shoulders of her daughter, and the jolly days with the 120th, and Dr. Jephson's one-horse chaise, and the Warwickshire hunt, and—and Louisa S——, but never mind *her*, came back to my mind. Has that good-natured, simple fellow at last met with his reward? Well, if he has not to marry the mother-in-law too, he may get on well enough.

Another year announced the retirement of Assistant-Surgeon Haggarty from the 120th, where he was replaced by Assistant-Surgeon Angus Rothsay Leech, a Scotchman, probably, with whom I have not the least acquaintance, and who has nothing whatever to do with this little history.

Still more years passed on, during which time I will not say that I kept a constant watch upon the fortunes of Mr. Haggarty and his lady, for, perhaps, if the truth were known, I never thought for a moment about them; until one day, being at Kingstown, near Dublin, dawdling on the beach, and staring at the Hill of Howth, as most people at that watering-place do, I saw coming towards me a tall gaunt man, with a pair of bushy red whiskers, of which I thought I had seen the like in former years, and a face which could be no other than Haggarty's. It was Haggarty, ten years older than when we last met, and greatly more grim and thin. He had on one shoulder a young gentleman in a dirty tartan costume, and a face exceedingly like his own peeping from under a battered plume of black feathers, while with his other hand he was dragging a light green go-cart, in which reposed a female infant of some two years old. Both were roaring with great power of lungs.

As soon as Dennis saw me his face lost the dull, puzzled expression which had seemed to characterise it; he dropped the pole of the go-cart from one hand, and his son from the other, and came jumping forward to greet me with all his might, leaving his progeny roaring in the road.

"Bless my sowl," says he, "sure it's Fitz-Boodle? Fitz, don't you remember me? Dennis Haggarty of the 120th? Leamington, you know? Molloy, my boy, hould your tongue, and stop your screeching, and Jemima's too; d'ye hear? Well, it does good to sore eyes to see an old face. How fat you're grown, Fitz; and were ye ever in Ireland before? and an't ye delighted with it? Confess, now, isn't it beautiful?"

This question regarding the merits of their country, which I have remarked is put by most Irish persons, being answered in a satisfactory manner, and the shouts of the infants appeased from an apple-stall hard by, Dennis and I talked of old times, and I congratulated him on his marriage with the lovely girl whom we all admired, and hoped he had a fortune with her, and so forth. His appearance, however, did not bespeak a great fortune; he had an old grey hat, short old trousers, an old waistcoat with regimental buttons, and patched blucher boots, such as are not usually sported by persons in easy life.

"Ah!" says he, with a sigh, in reply to my queries, "times are changed since them days, Fitz-Boodle. My wife's not what she was—the beautiful creature you knew her. Molloy, my boy, run off in a hurry to your mamma, and tell her an English gentleman is coming home to dine, for you'll dine with me, Fitz, in course?" And I agreed to partake of that meal, though Master Molloy altogether declined to obey his papa's orders with respect to announcing the stranger.

"Well, I must announce you myself," said Haggarty, with a smile. "Come, it's just dinner-time, and my little cottage is not a hundred yards off." Accordingly, we all marched in procession to Dennis's little cottage, which was one of a row and a half of one-storied houses, with little courtyards before them and mostly with very fine names on the doorposts of each. "Surgeon Haggarty" was emblazoned on Dennis's gate, on a stained green copper-plate; and, not content with this, on the doorpost above the bell was an oval with the inscription of "New Molloyville." The bell was broken, of course; the court, or garden-path, was mouldy, weedy, seedy; there were some dirty rocks, by way of ornament, round a faded grass-plat in the centre, some clothes and rags hanging out of most part of the windows of New Molloyville, the immediate entrance to which was by a battered scraper, under a broken trelliswork, up which a withered creeper declined any longer to climb.

"Small, but snug," says Haggarty. "I'll lead the way, Fitz; put your hat on the flower-pot there, and turn to the left into the drawing-room." A fog of onions and turf-smoke filled the whole of the house, and gave signs that dinner was not far off. Far off? You could hear it frizzling in the kitchen, where the maid was also endeavouring to hush the crying of a third refractory child. But as we entered, all three of Haggarty's darlings were in full war.

"Is it you, Dennis?" cried a sharp raw voice, from a dark corner in the drawing-room to which we were introduced, and in which a dirty table-cloth was laid for dinner, some bottles of porter and a cold mutton-bone being laid out on a rickety grand-piano hard by. "Ye're always late, Mr. Haggarty. Have you brought the whisky from Nowlan's? I'll go bail ye've not now."

"My dear, I've brought an old friend of yours and mine to take pot-luck with us to-day," said Dennis.

"When is he to come?" said the lady. At which speech I was rather surprised, for I stood before her.

"Here he is, Jemima, my love," answered Dennis, looking at me. "Mr. Fitz-Boodle; don't you remember him in Warwickshire, darling?"

"Mr. Fitz-Boodle! I am very glad to see him," said the lady, rising and curtsying with much cordiality.

Mrs. Haggarty was blind.

Mrs. Haggarty was not only blind, but it was evident that small-pox had been the cause of her loss of vision. Her eyes were bound with a bandage, her features were entirely swollen, scarred, and distorted by the horrible effects of the malady. She had been knitting in a corner when we entered, and was wrapped in a very dirty bed-gown. Her voice to me was quite different to that in which she addressed her husband. She spoke to Haggarty in broad Irish, she addressed me in that most odious of all languages—Irish-English, endeavouring to the utmost to disguise her brogue, and to speak with the true dawdling *distingué* English air.

"Are you long in I-a-land?" said the poor creature in this accent. "You must faind it a sad ba'ba'ous place, Mr. Fitz-Boodle, I'm shu-ah! It was very kaind of you to come upon us *en famille*, and accept a dinner *sans cérémonie*. Mr. Haggarty, I hope you'll put the waine into aice, Mr. Fitz-Boodle must be melted with this hot weathah."

For some time she conducted the conversation in this polite strain, and I was obliged to say in reply to a query of hers, that I did not find her the least altered, though I should never have recognised her but for this rencontre. She told Haggarty with a significant air to get the wine from the "cellah," and whispered to me that he was his own "butlah," and the poor fellow taking the hint scudded away into the town for a pound of veal cutlets and a couple of bottles of wine from the tavern.

"Will the childhren get their potatoes and butther here?" said a barefoot girl, with long black hair flowing over her face, which she thrust in at the door.

"Let them sup in the nursery, Elizabeth, and send—ah! Edwards to me."

"Is it cook you mane, ma'am?" said the girl.

"Send her at once!" shrieked the unfortunate woman; and the noise of frying presently ceasing, a hot woman made her appearance wiping her brows with her apron, and asking, with an accent decidedly Hibernian, what the misthress wanted.

"Lead me up to my dressing-room, Edwards, I really am not fit to be seen in this deshabille by Mr. Fitz-Boodle."

"Fait' I can't!" says Edwards; "sure the masther's out at the butcher's, and can't look to the kitchen fire!"

"Nonsense, I must go!" cried Mrs. Haggarty; and so Edwards, putting on a resigned air, and giving her arm and face a further rub with her apron, held out her arm to Mrs. Dennis, and the pair went upstairs.

She left me to indulge my reflections for half an hour, at the end of which period she came downstairs dressed in an old yellow satin, with the poor shoulders exposed just as much as ever. She had mounted a tawdry cap, which Haggarty himself must have selected for her. She had all sorts of necklaces, bracelets, and ear-rings in gold, in garnets, in mother-of-pearl, in ormolu. She brought in a furious savour of musk, which drove the odours of onions and turf-smoke before it; and she waved across her wretched, angular, mean, scarred features, an old cambric handkerchief with a yellow lace border.

"And so you would have known me anywhere, Mr. Fitz-Boodle?" said she, with a grin that was meant to be most fascinating. "I was sure you would; for though my dreadful illness deprived me of my sight, it is a mercy that it did not change my features or complexion at all!"

This mortification had been spared the unhappy woman; but I don't know whether with all her vanity, her infernal pride, folly, and selfishness, it was charitable to leave her in her error.

Yet why correct her? There is a quality in certain people which is above all advice, exposure, or correction. Only let a man or woman have DULNESS sufficient, and they need bow to no extant authority.

A dullard recognises no betters; a dullard can't see that he is in the wrong; a dullard has no scruples of conscience, no doubts of pleasing, or succeeding, or doing right, no qualms for other people's feelings, no respect but for the fool himself. How can you make a fool perceive that he is a fool? Such a personage can no more see his own folly than he can see his own ears. And the great quality of Dulness is to be unalterably contented with itself. What myriads of souls are there of this admirable sort—selfish, stingy, ignorant, passionate, brutal, bad sons, mothers, fathers, never known to do kind actions!

To pause, however, in this disquisition which was carrying us far off Kingstown, New Molloyville, Ireland—nay, into the wide world wherever Dulness inhabits, let it be stated that Mrs. Haggarty, from my brief acquaintance with her and her mother, was of the order of persons just mentioned. There was an air of conscious merit about her, very hard to swallow along with the infamous dinner poor Dennis managed, after much delay, to get on the table. She did not fail to invite me to Molloyville, where she said her cousin would be charmed to see me; and she told me almost as many anecdotes about that place as her mother used to impart in former days. I observed, moreover, that Dennis cut her the favourite pieces of the beefsteak, that she ate thereof with great gusto, and that she drank with similar eagerness of the various strong liquors at table. "We Irish ladies are all fond of a leetle glass of punch," she said, with a playful air, and Dennis mixed her a powerful tumbler of such violent grog as I myself could swallow only with some difficulty. She talked of her suffering a great deal, of her sacrifices, of the luxuries to which she had been accustomed before marriage—in a word, of a hundred of those themes on which some ladies are in the custom of enlarging when they wish to plague some husbands.

But honest Dennis, far from being angry at this perpetual, wearisome, impudent recurrence to her own superiority, rather encouraged the conversation than otherwise. It pleased him to hear his wife discourse about her merits and family splendours. He was so thoroughly beaten down and henpecked, that he, as it were, gloried in his servitude, and fancied that his wife's magnificence reflected credit on himself. He looked towards me, who was half sick of the woman and her egotism, as if expecting me to exhibit the deepest sympathy, and flung me glances across the table, as much as to say, "What a gifted creature my Jemima is, and what a fine fellow I am to be in possession of her!" When the children came down she scolded them, of course, and dismissed them abruptly (for which circumstance, perhaps, the writer of these pages was not in his heart very sorry), and, after having sat a preposterously long time, left us, asking whether we would have coffee there or in her boudoir.

"Oh! here, of course," said Dennis, with rather a troubled air, and in about ten minutes the lovely creature was led back to us again by "Edwards," and the coffee made its appearance. After coffee her husband begged her to let Mr. Fitz-Boodle hear her voice: "He longs for some of his old favourites."

"No, *do* you?" said she; and was led in triumph to the jingling old piano, and with a screechy, wiry voice, sang those very abominable old ditties which I had heard her sing at Leamington ten years back.

Haggarty, as she sang, flung himself back in his chair delighted. Husbands always are, and with the same song, one that they have heard when they were nineteen years old, probably; most Englishmen's tunes have that date, and it is rather affecting, I think, to hear an old gentleman of sixty or seventy quavering the old ditty that was fresh when *he* was fresh and in his prime. If he has a musical wife, depend on it he thinks her old songs of 1788 are better than any he has heard since; in fact he has heard *none* since. When the old couple are in high good-humour the old gentleman will take the old lady round the waist, and say, "My dear, do sing me one of your own songs," and she sits down and sings with her old voice, and, as she sings, the roses of her youth bloom again for a moment. Ranelagh resuscitates, and she is dancing a minuet in powder and a train.

This is another digression. It was occasioned by looking at poor Dennis's face while his wife was screeching (and, believe me, the former was the most pleasant occupation). Bottom tickled by the fairies could not have been in greater ecstasies. He thought the music was divine; and had further reason for exulting in it, which was, that his wife was always in a good humour after singing, and never would sing but in that happy frame of mind. Dennis had hinted so much in our little colloquy during the ten minutes of his lady's absence in the "boudoir"; so, at the conclusion of each piece, we shouted "Bravo!" and clapped our hands like mad.

Such was my insight into the life of Surgeon Dionysius Haggarty and his wife; and I must have come upon him at a favourable moment too, for poor Dennis has spoken, subsequently, of our delightful evening at Kingstown, and evidently thinks to this day that his friend was fascinated by the entertainment there. His inward economy was as follows: he had his half-pay, a thousand pounds, about a hundred a year that his father left, and his wife had sixty pounds a year from the mother, which the mother, of course, never paid. He had no practice, for he was absorbed in attention to his Jemima and the children, whom he used to wash, to dress, to carry out, to walk, or to ride, as we have seen, and who could not have a servant, as their dear blind mother could never be left alone. Mrs. Haggarty, a great invalid, used to lie in bed till one, and have breakfast and hot luncheon there. A fifth part of his income was spent in having her wheeled about in a chair, by which it was his duty to walk daily for an allotted number of hours. Dinner would ensue, and the amateur clergy, who abound in Ireland, and of whom Mrs. Haggarty was a great admirer, lauded her everywhere as a model of resignation and virtue, and praised beyond measure the admirable piety with which she bore her sufferings.

Well, every man to his taste. It did not certainly appear to me that *she* was the martyr of the family.

"The circumstances of my marriage with Jemima," Dennis said to me, in some after conversations we had on this interesting subject, "were the most romantic and touching you can conceive. You saw what an impression the dear girl had made upon me when we were at Weedon; for from the first day I set eyes on her, and heard her sing her delightful song of *Dark-eyed Maiden of Araby*, I felt, and said to Turniquet of ours, that very night, that *she* was the dark-eyed maid of Araby for *me*—not that she was, you know, for she was born in Shropshire. But I felt that I had seen the woman who was to make me happy or miserable for life. You know how I proposed for her at Kenilworth, and how I was rejected, and how I almost shot myself in consequence—no, you don't know that, for I said nothing about it to anyone, but I can tell you it was a very near thing, and a very lucky thing for me I didn't do it, for—would you believe it?—the dear girl was in love with me all the time."

"Was she really?" said I, who recollected that Miss Gam's love of those days showed itself in a very singular manner; but the fact is, when women are most in love they most disguise it.

"Over head and ears in love with poor Dennis," resumed that worthy fellow, "who'd ever have thought it? But I have it from the best authority, from her own mother, with whom I'm not over and above good friends now, but of this fact she assured me, and I'll tell you when and how.

"We were quartered at Cork three years after we were at Weedon, and it was our last year at home, and a great mercy that my dear girl spoke in time, or where should we have been *now?* Well, one day, marching home from parade, I saw a lady seated at an open window by another, who seemed an invalid, and the lady at the window, who was dressed in the profoundest mourning, cried out, with a scream, 'Gracious Heavens! it's Mr. Haggarty of the 120th.'

" 'Sure I know that voice,' says I to Whiskerton.

" 'It's a great mercy you don't know it a deal too well,' says he, 'it's Lady Gammon. She's on some husband-hunting scheme, depend on it, for that daughter of hers. She was at Bath last year on the same errand, and at Cheltenham the year before, where, Heaven bless you! she's as well known as the Hen and Chickens.'

" 'I'll thank you not to speak disrespectfully of Miss Jemima Gam,' said I to Whiskerton; 'she's of one of the first families in Ireland, and whoever says a word against a woman I once proposed for, insults me—do you understand!'

" 'Well, marry her, if you like,' says Whiskerton, quite peevish, 'marry her, and be hanged!'

"Marry her! the very idea of it set my brain a-whirling, and made me a thousand times more mad than I am by nature.

"You may be sure I walked up the hill to the parade-ground that afternoon, and with a beating heart too. I came to the widow's house. It was called 'New Molloyville,' as this is. Wherever she takes a house for six months, she calls it 'New Molloyville'; and has had one in Mallow, in Bandon, in Sligo, in Castlebar, in Fermoy, in Drogheda, and the deuce knows where besides; but the blinds were down, and though I thought I saw somebody behind 'em, no notice was taken of poor Denny Haggarty, and I paced up and down all mess-time in hopes of catching a glimpse of Jemima, but in vain. The next day I was on the ground again; I was just as much in love as ever, that's the fact. I'd never been in that way before, look you, and when once caught, I knew it was for life.

"There's no use in telling you how long I beat about the bush, but when I *did* get admittance to the house (it was through the means of young Castlereagh Molloy, whom you may remember at Leamington, and who was at Cork for the regatta, and used to dine at our mess, and had taken a mighty fancy to me), when I *did* get into the house, I say, I rushed *in medias res* at once; I couldn't keep myself quiet, my heart was too full.

"Oh, Fitz! I shall never forget the day—the moment I was inthrojuiced into the dthrawing-room" (as he began to be agitated, Dennis's brogue broke out with greater richness than ever, but though a stranger may catch, and repeat from memory, a few words, it is next to impossible for him to *keep up a conversation* in Irish, so that we had best give up all attempts to imitate Dennis), "when I saw old Mother Gam," said he, "my feelings overcame me all at once; I rowled down on the ground, sir, as if I'd been hit by a musket-ball. 'Dearest madam,' says I, 'I'll die if you don't give me Jemima.'

" 'Heavens! Mr. Haggarty,' says she, 'how you seize me with surprise! Castlereagh, my dear nephew, had you not better leave us?' and away he went, lighting a cigar, and leaving me still on the floor.

" 'Rise, Mr. Haggarty,' continued the widow. 'I will not attempt to deny that this constancy towards my daughter is extremely affecting, however sudden your present appeal may be. I will not attempt to deny that, perhaps, Jemima may feel a similar; but, as I said, I never could give my daughter to a Catholic.'

" 'I'm as good a Protestant as yourself, ma'am,' says I; 'my mother was an heiress, and we were all brought up her way.'

" 'That makes the matter very different,' says she, turning up the whites of her eyes. 'How could I ever have reconciled it to my conscience to see my blessed child married to a Papist? How could I ever have taken him to Molloyville? Well, this obstacle being removed, *I* must put myself no longer in the way between two young people. *I* must sacrifice myself, as I always have when my darling girl was in question. You shall see her, the poor, dear, lovely, gentle sufferer, and learn your fate from her own lips.'

" 'The sufferer, ma'am,' says I; 'has Miss Gam been ill?'

" 'What! haven't you heard!' cried the widow. 'Haven't you heard of the dreadful illness which so nearly carried her from me? For nine weeks, Mr. Haggarty, I watched her day and night, without taking a wink of sleep—for nine weeks she lay trembling between death and life, and I paid the doctor eighty-three guineas. She is restored now, but she is the wreck of the beautiful creature she was. Suffering, and, perhaps, *another disappointment*—but we won't mention that *now*—have pulled her so down. But I will leave you, and prepare my sweet girl for this strange, this entirely unexpected visit.'

"I won't tell you what took place between me and Jemima, to whom I was introduced as she sat in the darkened room, poor sufferer! nor describe to you with what a thrill of joy I seized (after groping about for it) her poor emaciated hand. She did not withdraw it; I came out of that room an engaged man, sir; and *now* I was enabled to show her that I had always loved her sincerely, for there was my will, made three years back, in her favour; that night she refused me, as I told ye, I would have shot myself, but they'd have brought me in *non compos*, and my brother Mick would have contested the will, and so I determined to live, in order that she might benefit by my dying. I had but a thousand pounds then, since that my father has left me two more; I willed every shilling upon her, as you may fancy, and settled it upon her when we married, as we did soon after. It was not for some time that I was allowed to see the poor girl's face, or, indeed, was aware of the horrid loss she had sustained. Fancy my agony, my dear fellow, when I saw that beautiful wreck!"

There was something not a little affecting to think, in the conduct of this brave fellow; that he never once, as he told his story, seemed to allude to the possibility of his declining to marry a woman who was not the same as the woman he loved; but that he was quite as faithful to her now, as he had been when captivated by the poor, tawdry charms of the silly miss of Leamington. It was hard that such a noble heart as this should be flung away upon yonder foul mass of greedy vanity. Was it hard, or not, that he should remain deceived in his obstinate humility, and continue to admire the selfish, silly being whom he had chosen to worship?

"I should have been appointed surgeon of the regiment," continued Dennis, "soon after, when it was ordered abroad to Jamaica, where it now is. But my wife would not hear of going, and said she would break her heart if she left her mother. So I retired on half-pay, and took this cottage; and in case any practice should fall in my way, why there is my name on the brass plate, and I'm ready for anything that comes. But the only case that ever *did* come was one day when I was driving my wife in the chaise, and another, one night, of a beggar with a broken head. My wife makes me a present of a baby every year, and we've no debts; and between you and me and the post, as long as my mother-in-law is out of the house, I'm as happy as I need be."

"What, you and the old lady don't get on well?" said I.

"I can't say we do; it's not in nature, you know," said Dennis, with a faint grin. "She comes into the house, and turns it topsy-turvy. When she's here I'm obliged to sleep in the scullery. She's never paid her daughter's income since the first year, though she brags about her sacrifices as if she had ruined herself for Jemima; and besides, when she's here, there's a whole clan of the Molloys, horse, foot, and dragoons, that are quartered upon us, and eat me out of house and home."

"And is Molloyville such a fine place as the widow described it?" asked I, laughing, and not a little curious.

"Oh, a mighty fine place entirely!" said Dennis. "There's the oak park of two hundred acres, the finest land ye ever saw, only they've cut all the wood down. The garden in the old Molloy's time, they say, was the finest ever seen in the west of Ireland; but they've taken all the glass to mend the house windows, and small blame to them either. There's a clear rent-roll of three and fifty hundred a year, only it's in the hand of receivers; besides other debts, on which there is no land security."

"Your cousin-in-law, Castlereagh Molloy, won't come into a large fortune?"

"Oh, he'll do very well," said Dennis. "As long as he can get credit, he's not the fellow to stint himself. Faith, I was fool enough to put my name to a bit of paper for him, and they could not catch him in Mayo; they laid hold of me at Kingstown here. And there was a pretty to do. Didn't Mrs. Gam say I was ruining her family, that's all? I paid it by instalments (for all my money is settled on Jemima); and Castlereagh, who's an honourable fellow, offered me any satisfaction in life. Anyhow, he couldn't do more than *that*."

"Of course not, and now you're friends."

"Yes, and he and his aunt have had a tiff, too; and he abuses her properly, I warrant ye. He says that she carried about Jemima from place to place, and flung her at the head of every unmarried man in England a'most—my poor Jemima, and she all the while dying in love with me! As soon as she got over the small-pox—she took it at Fermoy—God bless her, I wish I'd been by to be her nurse-tender—as soon as she was rid of it, the old lady said to Castlereagh, 'Castlereagh, go to the bar'cks, and find out in the army list where the 120th is.' Off she came to Cork hot foot. It appears that while she was ill, Jemima's love for me showed itself in such a violent way that her mother was overcome, and promised that, should the dear child recover, she would try and bring us together. Castlereagh says she would have gone after us to Jamaica."

"I have no doubt she would," said I.

"Could you have a stronger proof of love than that?" cried Dennis. "My dear girl's illness and frightful blindness have, of course, injured her health and her temper. She cannot in her position look to the children, you know, and so they come under my charge for the most part; and her temper is unequal, certainly. But you see what a sensitive, refined, elegant creature she is, and may fancy that she's often put out by a rough fellow like me."

Here Dennis left me, saying it was time to go and walk out the children; and I think his story has matter of some wholesome reflection in it for bachelors who are about to change their condition, or may console some who are mourning their celibacy. Marry, gentlemen, if you like; leave your comfortable dinner at the club for cold mutton and curl-papers at your home; give up your books or pleasures, and take to yourselves wives and children; but think well on what you do first, as I have no doubt you will after this advice and example. Advice is always useful in matters of love; men always take it; they always follow other people's opinions, not their own: they always profit by example. When they see a pretty woman, and feel the delicious madness of love coming over them, they always stop to calculate her temper, her money, their own money, or suitableness for the married life. . . . Ha, ha ha! Let us fool in this way no more. I have been in love forty-three times with all ranks and conditions of women, and would have married every time if they would have let me. How many wives had King Solomon, the wisest of men? And is not that story a warning to us that Love is master of the wisest? It is only fools who defy him.

I must come, however, to the last, and perhaps the saddest, part of poor Denny Haggarty's history. I met him once more, and in such a condition as made me determine to write this history.

In the month of June last, I happened to be at Richmond, a delightful little place of retreat; and there, sunning himself upon the terrace, was my old friend of the 120th; he looked older, thinner, poorer, and more wretched, than I had ever seen him.

"What! you have given up Kingstown?" said I, shaking him by the hand.

"Yes," says he.

"And is my lady and your family here at Richmond?"

"No," says he, with a sad shake of the head; and the poor fellow's hollow eyes filled with tears.

"Good Heavens, Denny! what's the matter?" said I. He was squeezing my hand like a vice as I spoke.

"They've LEFT me!" he burst out with a dreadful shout of passionate grief—a horrible scream which seemed to be wrenched out of his heart; "left me!" said he, sinking down on a seat, and clenching his great fists, and shaking his lean arms wildly. "I'm a wise man now, Mr. Fitz-Boodle. Jemima has gone away from me, and yet you know how I loved her, and how happy we were! I've got nobody now; but I'll die soon, that's one comfort; and to think it's she that'll kill me after all!"

The story, which he told with a wild and furious lamentation such as is not known among men of our cooler country, and such as I don't like now to recall, was a very simple one. The mother-in-law had taken possession of the house, and had driven him from it. His property at his marriage was settled on his wife. She had never loved him, and told him this secret at last, and drove him out of doors with her selfish scorn and ill temper. The boy had died; the girls were better, he said, brought up among the Molloys than they could be with him; and so he was quite alone in the world, and was living, or rather dying, on forty pounds a year.

His troubles are very likely over by this time. The two fools who caused his misery will never read this history of him; *they* never read godless stories in magazines; and I wish, honest reader, that you and I went to church as much as they do. These people are not wicked *because* of their religious observances, but *in spite* of them. They are too dull to understand humility; too blind to see a tender and simple heart under a rough ungainly bosom. They are sure that all their conduct towards my poor friend here has been perfectly righteous, and that they have given proofs of the most Christian virtue. Haggarty's wife is considered by her friends as a martyr to her savage husband, and her mother is the angel that has come to rescue her. All they did was to cheat him and desert him. And safe in that wonderful self-complacency with which the fools of this earth are endowed, they have not a single pang of conscience for their villainy towards him, and consider their heartlessness as a proof and consequence of their spotless piety and virtue.

CHARLES DICKENS

(1812–1870)

CHARLES DICKENS was born of parents in straitened, if not desperately poor, circumstances, and he had few advantages in the way of early education. His childhood life was spent under the perpetual cloud of penury and contrivance. Vigorous and determined in character, such erudition as he achieved he owed very largely to his own individual efforts. His first essay with the pen was Parliamentary reporting, but the publication of *The Pickwick Papers* (1837) almost immediately placed him in a position of independence. An exuberant flow of stories, novels, and plays occupied him busily throughout the years that intervened until his death at Gad's Hill, near Maidstone, in 1870.

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THE SEVEN POOR TRAVELLERS

In Three Chapters

CHAPTER I

IN THE OLD CITY OF ROCHESTER

STRICTLY speaking, there were only six Poor Travellers; but, being a Traveller myself, though an idle one, and being withal as poor as I hope to be, I brought the number up to seven. This word of explanation is due at once, for what says the inscription over the quaint old door?

Richard Watts, Esq.
by his Will, dated 22 Aug. 1579,
founded this Charity
for Six poor Travellers,
who not being Rogues, or Proctors,
May receive gratis for one Night,
Lodging, Entertainment,
and Fourpence each.

It was in the ancient little city of Rochester in Kent, of all the good days in the year upon a Christmas-eve, that I stood reading this inscription over the quaint old door in question. I had been wandering about the neighbouring Cathedral, and had seen the tomb of Richard Watts, with the effigy of worthy Master Richard starting out of it like a ship's figure-head; and I had felt that I could do no less, as I gave the Verger his fee, than inquire the way to Watts's Charity. The way being very short and very plain, I had come prosperously to the inscription and the quaint old door.

"Now," said I to myself, as I looked at the knocker, "I know I am not a Proctor; I wonder whether I am a Rogue!"

Upon the whole, though Conscience reproduced two or three pretty faces which might have had smaller attraction for a moral Goliath than they had had for me, who am but a Tom Thumb in that way, I came to the conclusion that I was not a Rogue. So, beginning to regard the establishment as in some sort my property, bequeathed to me and divers co-legatees, share and share alike, by the Worshipful Master Richard Watts, I stepped backward into the road to survey my inheritance.

I found it to be a clean white house, of a staid and venerable air, with the quaint old door already three times mentioned (an arched door), choice little long low lattice-windows, and a roof of three gables. The silent High-street of Rochester is full of gables, with old beams and timbers carved into strange faces. It is oddly garnished with a queer old clock that projects over the pavement out of a grave red-brick building, as if Time carried on business there, and hung out his sign. Sooth to say, he did an active stroke of work in Rochester, in the old days of the Romans, and the Saxons, and the Normans; and down to the times of King John, when the rugged castle—I will not undertake to say how many hundreds of years old then—was abandoned to the centuries of weather which have so defaced the dark apertures in its walls, that the ruin looks as if the rooks and daws had pecked its eyes out.

I was very well pleased, both with my property and its situation. While I was yet surveying it with growing content, I espied, at one of the upper lattices which stood open, a decent body, of a wholesome matronly appearance, whose eyes I caught inquiringly addressed to mine. They said so plainly, "Do you wish to see the house?" that I answered aloud, "Yes, if you please." And within a minute the old door opened, and I bent my head, and went down two steps into the entry.

"This," said the matronly presence, ushering me into a low room on the right, "is where the Travellers sit by the fire, and cook what bits of suppers they buy with their fourpences."

"Oh! Then they have no Entertainment?" said I. For the inscription over the outer door was still running in my head, and I was mentally repeating, in a kind of tune, "Lodging, Entertainment, and fourpence each."

"They have a fire provided for 'em," returned the matron—a mighty civil person, not, as I could make out, overpaid; "and these cooking utensils. And this what's painted on a board is the rules for their behaviour. They have their fourpences when they get their tickets from the steward over the way—for I don't admit 'em myself, they must get their tickets first—and sometimes one buys a rasher of bacon, and another a herring, and another a pound of potatoes, or what not. Sometimes two or three of 'em will club their fourpences together, and make a supper that way. But not much of anything is to be got for fourpence, at present, when provisions is so dear."

"True indeed," I remarked. I had been looking about the room, admiring its snug fireside at the upper end, its glimpse of the street through the low mullioned window, and its beams overhead. "It is very comfortable," said I.

"Ill-conwenient," observed the matronly presence.

I liked to hear her say so; for it showed a commendable anxiety to execute in no niggardly spirit the intentions of Master Richard Watts. But the room was really so well adapted to its purpose that I protested, quite enthusiastically, against her disparagement.

"Nay, ma'am," said I, "I am sure it is warm in winter and cool in summer. It has a look of homely welcome and soothing rest. It has a remarkably cosy fireside, the very blink of which, gleaming out into the street upon a winter night, is enough to warm all Rochester's heart. And as to the convenience of the six Poor Travellers——"

"I don't mean them," returned the presence. "I speak of its being an ill-conwenience to myself and my daughter, having no other room to sit in of a night."

This was true enough, but there was another quaint room of corresponding dimensions on the opposite side of the entry: so I stepped across to it, through the open doors of both rooms, and asked what this chamber was for.

"This," returned the presence, "is the Board Room. Where the gentlemen meet when they come here."

Let me see. I had counted from the street six upper windows besides these on the ground-story. Making a perplexed calculation in my mind, I rejoined, "Then the six Poor Travellers sleep upstairs?"

My new friend shook her head. "They sleep," she answered, "in two little outer galleries at the back, where their beds has always been, ever since the Charity was founded. It being so very ill-conwenient to me as things is at present, the gentlemen are going to take off a bit of the back yard, and make a slip of a room for 'em there, to sit in before they go to bed."

"And then the six Poor Travellers," said I, "will be entirely out of the house?"

"Entirely out of the house," assented the presence, comfortably smoothing her hands. "Which is considered much better for all parties, and much more conwenient."

I had been a little startled, in the Cathedral, by the emphasis with which the effigy of Master Richard Watts was bursting out of his tomb; but I began to think, now, that it might be expected to come across the High-street some stormy night, and make a disturbance here.

Howbeit, I kept my thoughts to myself, and accompanied the presence to the little galleries at the back. I found them on a tiny scale, like the galleries in old inn-yards; and they were very clean. While I was looking at them, the matron gave me to understand that the prescribed number of Poor Travellers were forthcoming every night from year's end to year's end; and that the beds were always occupied. My questions upon this, and her replies, brought us back to the Board Room so essential to the dignity of "the gentlemen," where she showed me the printed accounts of the Charity hanging up by the window. From them I gathered that the greater part of the property bequeathed by the Worshipful Master Richard Watts for the maintenance of this foundation was, at the period of his death, mere marshland; but that, in course of time, it had been reclaimed and built upon, and was very considerably increased in value. I found, too, that about a thirtieth part of the annual revenue was now expended on the purposes commemorated in the inscription over the door; the rest being handsomely laid out in Chancery, law expenses, collectorship, receivership, poundage, and other appendages of management, highly complimentary to the importance of the six Poor Travellers. In short, I made the not entirely new discovery that it may be said of an establishment like this, in dear old England, as of the fat oyster in the American story, that it takes a good many men to swallow it whole.

"And pray, ma'am," said I, sensible that the blankness of my face began to brighten as the thought occurred to me, "could one see these Travellers?"

"Well!" she returned dubiously, "no!"

"Not to-night, for instance!" said I.

"Well!" she returned more positively, "no. Nobody ever asked to see them, and nobody ever did see them."

As I am not easily baulked in a design when I am set upon it, I urged to the good lady that this was Christmas-eve; that Christmas comes but once a year—which is unhappily too true, for when it begins to stay with us the whole year round we shall make this earth a very different place; that I was possessed by the desire to treat the Travellers to a supper and a temperate glass of hot Wassail; that the voice of Fame had been heard in that land, declaring my ability to make hot Wassail; that if I were permitted to hold the feast, I should be found conformable to reason, sobriety, and good hours; in a word, that I could be merry and wise myself, and had been even known at a pinch to keep others so, although I was decorated with no badge or medal, and was not a Brother, Orator, Apostle, Saint, or Prophet of any denomination whatever. In the end I prevailed, to my great joy. It was settled that at nine o'clock that night a Turkey and a piece of Roast Beef should smoke upon the board; and that I, faint and unworthy minister for once of Master Richard Watts, should preside as the Christmas-supper host of the six Poor Travellers.

I went back to my inn to give the necessary directions for the Turkey and Roast Beef, and, during the remainder of the day, could settle to nothing for thinking of the Poor Travellers. When the wind blew hard against the windows—it was a cold day, with dark gusts of sleet alternating with periods of wild brightness, as if the year were dying fitfully—I pictured them advancing towards their resting-place along various cold roads, and felt delighted to think how little they foresaw the supper that awaited them. I painted their portraits in my mind, and indulged in little heightening touches. I made them footsore; I made them weary; I made them carry packs and bundles; I made them stop by finger-posts and milestones, leaning on their bent sticks, and looking wistfully at what was written there; I made them lose their way; and filled their five wits with apprehensions of lying out all night, and being frozen to death. I took up my hat, and went out, climbed to the top of the Old Castle, and looked over the windy hills that slope down to the Medway, almost believing that I could descry some of my Travellers in the distance. After it fell dark, and the Cathedral bell was heard in the invisible steeple—quite a bower of frosty rime when I had last seen it—striking five, six, seven, I became so full of my Travellers that I could eat no dinner, and felt constrained to watch them still in the red coals of my fire. They were all arrived by this time, I thought, had got their tickets, and were gone in.—There my pleasure was dashed by the reflection that probably some Travellers had come too late and were shut out.

After the Cathedral bell had struck eight, I could smell a delicious savour of Turkey and Roast Beef rising to the window of my adjoining bedroom, which looked down into the inn-yard just where the lights of the kitchen reddened a massive fragment of the Castle Wall. It was high time to make the Wassail now; therefore I had up the materials (which, together with their proportions and combinations, I must decline to impart, as the only secret of my own I was ever known to keep), and made a glorious jorum. Not in a bowl; for a bowl anywhere but on a shelf is a low superstition, fraught with cooling and slopping; but in a brown earthenware pitcher, tenderly suffocated, when full, with a coarse cloth. It being now upon the stroke of nine, I set out for Watts's Charity, carrying my brown beauty in my arms. I would trust Ben, the waiter, with untold gold; but there are strings in the human heart which must never be sounded by another, and drinks that I make myself are those strings in mine.

The Travellers were all assembled, the cloth was laid, and Ben had brought a great billet of wood, and had laid it artfully on the top of the fire, so that a touch or two of the poker after supper should make a roaring blaze. Having deposited my brown beauty in a red nook of the hearth, inside the fender, where she soon began to sing like an ethereal cricket, diffusing at the same time odours as of ripe vineyards, spice forests, and orange groves—I say, having stationed my beauty in a place of security and improvement, I introduced myself to my guests by shaking hands all round, and giving them a hearty welcome.

I found the party to be thus composed. Firstly, myself. Secondly, a very decent man indeed, with his right arm in a sling, who had a certain clean agreeable smell of wood about him, from which I judged him to have something to do with shipbuilding. Thirdly, a little sailor-boy, a mere child, with a profusion of rich dark brown hair, and deep womanly-looking eyes. Fourthly, a shabby-genteel personage in a threadbare black suit, and apparently in very bad circumstances, with a dry suspicious look; the absent buttons on his waistcoat eked out with red tape; and a bundle of extraordinarily tattered papers sticking out of an inner breast-pocket. Fifthly, a foreigner by birth, but an Englishman in speech, who carried his pipe in the band of his hat, and lost no time in telling me, in an easy, simple, engaging way, that he was a watchmaker from Geneva, and travelled all about the Continent, mostly on foot, working as a journeyman, and seeing new countries—possibly (I thought) also smuggling a watch or so, now and then. Sixthly, a little widow, who had been very pretty and was still very young, but whose beauty had been wrecked in some great misfortune, and whose manner was remarkably timid, scared, and solitary. Seventhly and lastly, a Traveller of a kind familiar to my boyhood, but now almost obsolete—a Book-Pedlar, who had a quantity of Pamphlets and Numbers with him, and who presently boasted that he could repeat more verses in an evening than he could sell in a twelvemonth.

All these I have mentioned in the order in which they sat at table. I presided, and the matronly presence faced me. We were not long in taking our places, for the supper had arrived with me, in the following procession:

Myself with the pitcher.
Ben with Beer.
Inattentive Boy with hot plates. Inattentive Boy with hot plates.
THE TURKEY.
Female carrying sauces to be heated on the spot.
THE BEEF.
Man with Tray on his head, containing Vegetables and Sundries.
Volunteer Hostler from Hotel, grinning,
And rendering no assistance.

As we passed along the High-street, comet-like, we left a long tail of fragrance behind us which caused the public to stop, sniffing in wonder. We had previously left at the corner of the inn-yard a wall-eyed young man connected with the Fly department, and well accustomed to the sound of a railway whistle which Ben always carries in his pocket, whose instructions were, so soon as he should hear the whistle blown, to dash into the kitchen, seize the hot plum-pudding and mince-pies, and speed with them to Watts's Charity, where they would be received (he was further instructed) by the sauce-female, who would be provided with brandy in a blue state of combustion.

All these arrangements were executed in the most exact and punctual manner. I never saw a finer turkey, finer beef, or greater prodigality of sauce and gravy; and my Travellers did wonderful justice to everything set before them. It made my heart rejoice to observe how their wind- and frost-hardened faces softened in the clatter of plates and knives and forks, and mellowed in the fire and supper heat. While their hats and caps and wrappers, hanging up, a few small bundles on the ground in a corner, and in another corner three or four old walking-sticks, worn down at the end to mere fringe, linked this snug interior with the bleak outside in a golden chain.

When supper was done, and my brown beauty had been elevated on the table, there was a general requisition to me to "take the corner"; which suggested to me comfortably enough how much my friends here made of a fire—for when had *I* ever thought so highly of the corner, since the days when I connected it with Jack Horner? However, as I declined, Ben, whose touch on all convivial instruments is perfect, drew the table apart, and instructing my Travellers to open right and left on either side of me, and form round the fire, closed up the centre with myself and my chair, and preserved the order we had kept at table. He had already, in a tranquil manner, boxed the ears of the inattentive boys until they had been by imperceptible degrees boxed out of the room; and he now rapidly skirmished the sauce-female into the High-street, disappeared, and softly closed the door.

This was the time for bringing the poker to bear on the billet of wood. I tapped it three times, like an enchanted talisman, and a brilliant host of merry-makers burst out of it, and sported off by the chimney—rushing up the middle in a fiery country dance, and never coming down again. Meanwhile, by their sparkling light, which threw our lamp into the shade, I filled the glasses, and gave my Travellers, CHRISTMAS!—CHRISTMAS-EVE, my friends, when the shepherds, who were Poor Travellers, too, in their way, heard the Angels sing, "On earth, peace. Good-will towards men!"

I don't know who was the first among us to think that we ought to take hands as we sat, in deference to the toast, or whether any one of us anticipated the others, but at any rate we all did it. We then drank to the memory of the good Master Richard Watts. And I wish his Ghost may never have had worse usage under that roof than it had from us.

It was the witching time for Story-telling. "Our whole life, Travellers," said I, "is a story more or less intelligible—generally less; but we shall read it by a clearer light when it is ended. I, for one, am so divided this night between fact and fiction, that I scarce know which is which. Shall I beguile the time by telling you a story as we sit here?"

They all answered, yes. I had little to tell them, but I was bound by my own proposal. Therefore, after looking for awhile at the spiral column of smoke wreathing up from my brown beauty, through which I could have almost sworn I saw the effigy of Master Richard Watts less startled than usual, I fired away.

CHAPTER II

THE STORY OF RICHARD DOUBLEDICK

In the year one thousand seven hundred and ninety-nine, a relative of mine came limping down, on foot, to this town of Chatham. I call it this town, because if anybody present knows to a nicety where Rochester ends and Chatham begins, it is more than I do. He was a poor traveller, with not a farthing in his pocket. He sat by the fire in this very room, and he slept one night in a bed that will be occupied to-night by some one here.

My relative came down to Chatham to enlist in a cavalry regiment, if a cavalry regiment would have him; if not, to take King George's shilling from any corporal or sergeant who would put a bunch of ribbons in his hat. His object was to get shot; but he thought he might as well ride to death as be at the trouble of walking.

My relative's Christian name was Richard, but he was better known as Dick. He dropped his own surname on the road down, and took up that of Doubledick. He was passed as Richard Doubledick; age, twenty-two; height, five foot ten; native place, Exmouth, which he had never been near in his life. There was no cavalry in Chatham when he limped over the bridge here with half a shoe to his dusty feet, so he enlisted into a regiment of the line, and was glad to get drunk and forget all about it.

You are to know that this relative of mine had gone wrong, and run wild. His heart was in the right place, but it was sealed up. He had been betrothed to a good and beautiful girl, whom he had loved better than she—or perhaps even he—believed; but in an evil hour he had given her cause to say to him solemnly, "Richard, I will never marry another man. I will live single for your sake, but Mary Marshall's lips"—her name was Mary Marshall—"will never address another word to you on earth. Go, Richard! Heaven forgive you!" This finished him. This brought him down to Chatham. This made him Private Richard Doubledick, with a determination to be shot.

There was not a more dissipated and reckless soldier in Chatham barracks, in the year one thousand seven hundred and ninety-nine, than Private Richard Doubledick. He associated with the dregs of every regiment; he was as seldom sober as he could be, and was constantly under punishment. It became clear to the whole barracks that Private Richard Doubledick would very soon be flogged.

Now the Captain of Richard Doubledick's company was a young gentleman not above five years his senior, whose eyes had an expression in them which affected Private Richard Doubledick in a very remarkable way. They were bright, handsome, dark eyes—what are called laughing eyes generally, and, when serious, rather steady than severe—but they were the only eyes now left in his narrowed world that Private Richard Doubledick could not stand. Unabashed by evil report and punishment, defiant of everything else and everybody else, he had but to know that those eyes looked at him for a moment, and he felt ashamed. He could not so much as salute Captain Taunton in the street like any other officer. He was reproached and confused—troubled by the mere possibility of the captain's looking at him. In his worst moments, he would rather turn back, and go any distance out of his way, than encounter those two handsome, dark, bright eyes.

One day, when Private Richard Doubledick came out of the Black hole, where he had been passing the last eight-and-forty hours, and in which retreat he spent a good deal of his time, he was ordered to betake himself to Captain Taunton's quarters. In the stale and squalid state of a man just out of the Black hole, he had less fancy than ever for being seen by the Captain; but he was not so mad yet as to disobey orders, and consequently went up to the terrace overlooking the parade-ground, where the officers' quarters were; twisting and breaking in his hands, as he went along, a bit of the straw that had formed the decorative furniture of the Black hole.

"Come in!" cried the Captain, when he knocked with his knuckles at the door. Private Richard Doubledick pulled off his cap, took a stride forward, and felt very conscious that he stood in the light of the dark, bright eyes.

There was a silent pause. Private Richard Doubledick had put the straw in his mouth, and was gradually doubling it up into his windpipe and choking himself.

"Doubledick," said the Captain, "do you know where you are going to?"

"To the Devil, sir?" faltered Doubledick.

"Yes," returned the Captain. "And very fast."

Private Richard Doubledick turned the straw of the Black hole in his mouth, and made a miserable salute of acquiescence.

"Doubledick," said the Captain, "since I entered his Majesty's service, a boy of seventeen, I have been pained to see many men of promise going that road; but I have never been so pained to see a man determined to make the shameful journey as I have been, ever since you joined the regiment, to see you."

Private Richard Doubledick began to find a film stealing over the floor at which he looked; also to find the legs of the Captain's breakfast-table turning crooked, as if he saw them through water.

"I am only a common soldier, sir," said he. "It signifies very little what such a poor brute comes to."

"You are a man," returned the Captain, with grave indignation, "of education and superior advantages; and if you say that, meaning what you say, you have sunk lower than I had believed. How low that must be, I leave you to consider, knowing what I know of your disgrace, and seeing what I see."

"I hope to get shot soon, sir," said Private Richard Doubledick; "and then the regiment and the world together will be rid of me."

The legs of the table were becoming very crooked. Doubledick, looking up to steady his vision, met the eyes that had so strong an influence over him. He put his hand before his own eyes, and the breast of his disgrace-jacket swelled as if it would fly asunder.

"I would rather," said the young Captain, "see this in you, Doubledick, than I would see five thousand guineas counted out upon this table for a gift to my good mother. Have you a mother?"

"I am thankful to say she is dead, sir."

"If your praises," returned the Captain, "were sounded from mouth to mouth through the whole regiment, through the whole army, through the whole country, you would wish she had lived to say, with pride and joy, 'He is my son!'"

"Spare me, sir," said Doubledick. "She would never have heard any good of me. She would never have had any pride and joy in owning herself my mother. Love and compassion she might have had, and would have always had, I know; but not—Spare me, sir! I am a broken wretch, quite at your mercy!" And he turned his face to the wall, and stretched out his imploring hand.

"My friend——" began the Captain.

"God bless you, sir!" sobbed Private Richard Doubledick.

"You are at the crisis of your fate. Hold your course unchanged a little longer, and you know what must happen. *I* know even better than you can imagine, that, after that has happened, you are lost. No man who could shed those tears could bear those marks."

"I fully believe it, sir," in a low, shivering voice said Private Richard Doubledick.

"But a man in any station can do his duty," said the young Captain, "and in doing it, can earn his own respect, even if his case should be so very unfortunate and so very rare that he can earn no other man's. A common soldier, poor brute though you called him just now, has this advantage in the stormy times we live in, that he always does his duty before a host of sympathising witnesses. Do you doubt that he may so do it as to be extolled through a whole regiment, through a whole army, through a whole country? Turn while you may yet retrieve the past, and try."

"I will! I ask for only one witness, sir," cried Richard, with a bursting heart.

"I understand you. I will be a watchful and a faithful one."

I have heard from Private Richard Doubledick's own lips, that he dropped down upon his knee, kissed that officer's hand, arose, and went out of the light of the dark, bright eyes, an altered man.

In that year, one thousand seven hundred and ninety-nine, the French were in Egypt, in Italy, in Germany, where not? Napoleon Bonaparte had likewise begun to stir against us in India, and most men could read the signs of the great troubles that were coming on. In the very next year, when we formed an alliance with Austria against him, Captain Taunton's regiment was on service in India. And there was not a finer non-commissioned officer in it—no, nor in the whole line—than Corporal Richard Doubledick.

In eighteen hundred and one, the Indian army were on the coast of Egypt. Next year was the year of the proclamation of the short peace, and they were recalled. It had then become well known to thousands of men, that wherever Captain Taunton, with the dark, bright eyes, led, there, close to him, ever at his side, firm as a rock, true as the sun, and brave as Mars, would be certain to be found, while life beat in their hearts, that famous soldier, Sergeant Richard Doubledick.

Eighteen hundred and five, besides being the great year of Trafalgar, was a year of hard fighting in India. That year saw such wonders done by a Sergeant-Major, who cut his way singlehanded through a solid mass of men, recovered the colours of his regiment, which had been seized from the hand of a poor boy shot through the heart, and rescued his wounded Captain, who was down, and in a very jungle of horses' hoofs and sabres—saw such wonders done, I say, by this brave Sergeant-Major, that he was specially made the bearer of the colours he had won; and Ensign Richard Doubledick had risen from the ranks.

Sorely cut up in every battle, but always reinforced by the bravest of men—for the fame of following the old colours, shot through and through, which Ensign Richard Doubledick had saved, inspired all breasts—this regiment fought its way through the Peninsular war, up to the investment of Badajos in eighteen hundred and twelve. Again and again it had been cheered through the British ranks until the tears had sprung into men's eyes at the mere hearing of the mighty British voice, so exultant in their valour; and there was not a drummer-boy but knew the legend, that wherever the two friends, Major Taunton, with the dark, bright eyes, and Ensign Richard Doubledick, who was devoted to him, were seen to go, there the boldest spirits in the English army became wild to follow.

One day, at Badajos—not in the great storming, but in repelling a hot sally of the besieged upon our men at work in the trenches, who had given way—the two officers found themselves hurrying forward, face to face, against a party of French infantry, who made a stand. There was an officer at their head, encouraging his men—a courageous, handsome, gallant officer of five-and-thirty, whom Doubledick saw hurriedly, almost momentarily, but saw well. He particularly noticed this officer waving his sword, and rallying his men with an eager and excited cry, when they fired in obedience to his gesture, and Major Taunton dropped.

It was over in ten minutes more, and Doubledick returned to the spot where he had laid the best friend man ever had on a coat spread upon the wet clay. Major Taunton's uniform was opened at the breast and on his shirt were three little spots of blood.

"Dear Doubledick," said he, "I am dying."

"For the love of Heaven, no!" exclaimed the other, kneeling down beside him, and passing his arm round his neck to raise his head. "Taunton! My preserver, my guardian angel, my witness! Dearest, truest, kindest of human beings! Taunton! For God's sake!"

The bright, dark eyes—so very, very dark now, in the pale face—smiled upon him; and the hand he had kissed thirteen years ago laid itself fondly on his breast.

"Write to my mother. You will see Home again. Tell her how we became friends. It will comfort her, as it comforts me."

He spoke no more, but faintly signed for a moment towards his hair as it fluttered in the wind. The Ensign understood him. He smiled again when he saw that, and, gently turning his face over on the supporting arm as if for rest, died, with his hand upon the breast in which he had revived a soul.

No dry eye looked on Ensign Richard Doubledick that melancholy day. He buried his friend on the field, and became a lone, bereaved man. Beyond his duty he appeared to have but two remaining cares in life—one, to preserve the little packet of hair he was to give to Taunton's mother; the other, to encounter that French officer who had rallied the men under whose fire Taunton fell. A new legend now began to circulate among our troops; and it was, that when he and the French officer came face to face once more, there would be weeping in France.

The war went on—and through it went the exact picture of the French officer on the one side, and the bodily reality upon the other—until the Battle of Toulouse was fought. In the returns sent home appeared these words: "Severely wounded but not dangerously, Lieutenant Richard Doubledick."

At Midsummer-time, in the year eighteen hundred and fourteen, Lieutenant Richard Doubledick, now a browned soldier, seven-and-thirty years of age, came home to England invalided. He brought the hair with him, near his heart. Many a French officer had he seen since that day; many a dreadful night, in searching with men and lanterns for his wounded, had he relieved French officers lying disabled; but the mental picture and the reality had never come together.

Though he was weak and suffered pain, he lost not an hour in getting down to Frome in Somersetshire, where Taunton's mother lived. In the sweet, compassionate words that naturally present themselves to the mind to-night, "he was the only son of his mother, and she was a widow."

It was a Sunday evening, and the lady sat at her quiet garden-window, reading the Bible; reading to herself, in a trembling voice, that very passage in it, as I have heard him tell. He heard the words: "Young man, I say unto thee, arise!"

He had to pass the window; and the bright, dark eyes of his debased time seemed to look at him. Her heart told her who he was; she came to the door quickly, and fell upon his neck.

"He saved me from ruin, made me a human creature, won me from infamy and shame. O God, for ever bless him! As He will, He will!"

"He will!" the lady answered. "I know he is in Heaven!" Then she piteously cried, "But oh, my darling boy, my darling boy!"

Never from the hour when Private Richard Doubledick enlisted at Chatham had the Private, Corporal, Sergeant, Sergeant-Major, Ensign, or Lieutenant breathed his right name, or the name of Mary Marshall, or a word of the story of his life, into any ear except his reclaimer's. That previous scene in his existence was closed. He had firmly resolved that his expiation should be to live unknown; to disturb no more the peace that had long grown over his old offences; to let it be revealed, when he was dead, that he had striven and suffered, and had never forgotten; and then, if they could forgive him and believe him—well, it would be time enough—time enough!

But that night, remembering the words he had cherished for two years, "Tell her how we became friends. It will comfort her, as it comforts me," he related everything. It gradually seemed to him as if in his maturity he had recovered a mother; it gradually seemed to her as if in her bereavement she had found a son. During his stay in England, the quiet garden into which he had slowly and painfully crept, a stranger, became the boundary of his home; when he was able to rejoin his regiment in the spring, he left the garden, thinking was this indeed the first time he had ever turned his face towards the old colours with a woman's blessing!

He followed them—so ragged, so scarred and pierced now, that they would scarcely hold together—to Quatre Bras and Ligny. He stood beside them, in an awful stillness of many men, shadowy through the mist and drizzle of a wet June forenoon, on the field of Waterloo. And down to that hour the picture in his mind of the French officer had never been compared with the reality.

The famous regiment was in action early in the battle, and received its first check in many an eventful year, when he was seen to fall. But it swept on to avenge him, and left behind it no such creature in the world of consciousness as Lieutenant Richard Doubledick.

Through pits of mire, and pools of rain; along deep ditches, once roads, that were pounded and ploughed to pieces by artillery, heavy wagons, tramp of men and horses, and the struggle of every wheeled thing that could carry wounded soldiers; jolted among the dying and the dead, so disfigured by blood and mud as to be hardly recognisable for humanity; undisturbed by the moaning of men and the shrieking of horses, which, newly taken from the peaceful pursuits of life, could not endure the sight of the stragglers lying by the wayside, never to resume their toilsome journey; dead, as to any sentient life that was in it, and yet alive—the form that had been Lieutenant Richard Doubledick, with whose praises England rang, was conveyed to Brussels. There it was tenderly laid down in hospital; and there it lay, week after week, through the long bright summer days, until the harvest, spared by war, had ripened and was gathered in.

Over and over again the sun rose and set upon the crowded city; over and over again the moonlight nights were quiet on the plains of Waterloo: and all that time was a blank to what had been Lieutenant Richard Doubledick. Rejoicing troops marched into Brussels, and marched out; brothers and fathers, sisters, mothers and wives, came thronging thither, drew their lots of joy or agony, and departed; so many times a day the bells rang; so many times the shadows of the great buildings changed; so many lights sprang up at dusk; so many feet passed here and there upon the pavements; so many hours of sleep and cooler air of night succeeded: indifferent to all, a marble face lay on a bed, like the face of a recumbent statue on the tomb of Lieutenant Richard Doubledick.

Slowly labouring, at last, through a long heavy dream of confused time and place, presenting faint glimpses of army surgeons whom he knew, and of faces that had been familiar to his youth—dearest and kindest among them, Mary Marshall's, with a solicitude upon it more like reality than anything he could discern—Lieutenant Richard Doubledick came back to life. To the beautiful life of a calm autumn evening sunset, to the peaceful life of a fresh quiet room with a large window standing open; a balcony beyond, in which were moving leaves and sweet-smelling flowers; beyond, again, the clear sky, with the sun full in his sight, pouring its golden radiance on his bed.

It was so tranquil and so lovely that he thought he had passed into another world. And he said in a faint voice, "Taunton, are you near me?"

A face bent over him. Not his, his mother's.

"I came to nurse you. We have nursed you many weeks. You were moved here long ago. Do you remember nothing?"

"Nothing."

The lady kissed his cheek, and held his hand, soothing him.

"Where is the regiment? What has happened? Let me call you mother. What has happened, mother?"

"A great victory, dear. The war is over, and the regiment was the bravest in the field."

His eyes kindled, his lips trembled, he sobbed, and the tears ran down his face. He was very weak, too weak to move his hand.

"Was it dark just now?" he asked presently.

"No."

"It was only dark to me? Something passed away, like a black shadow. But as it went, and the sun—oh, the blessed sun, how beautiful it is!—touched my face, I thought I saw a light white cloud pass out at the door. Was there nothing that went out?"

She shook her head, and in a little while he fell asleep, she still holding his hand, and soothing him.

From that time, he recovered. Slowly, for he had been desperately wounded in the head, and had been shot in the body, but making some little advance every day. When he had gained sufficient strength to converse as he lay in bed, he soon began to remark that Mrs. Taunton always brought him back to his own history. Then he recalled his preserver's dying words, and thought, "It comforts her."

One day he awoke out of a sleep, refreshed, and asked her to read to him. But the curtain of the bed, softening the light, which she always drew back when he awoke, that she might see him from her table at the bedside where she sat at work, was held undrawn; and a woman's voice spoke, which was not hers.

"Can you bear to see a stranger?" it said softly. "Will you like to see a stranger?"

"Stranger!" he repeated. The voice awoke old memories, before the days of Private Richard Doubledick.

"A stranger now, but not a stranger once," it said in tones that thrilled him. "Richard, dear Richard, lost through so many years, my name——"

He cried out her name, "Mary," and she held him in her arms and his head lay on her bosom.

"I am not breaking a rash vow, Richard. These are not Mary Marshall's lips that speak. I have another name."

She was married.

"I have another name, Richard. Did you ever hear it?"

"Never!"

He looked into her face, so pensively beautiful, and wondered at the smile upon it through her tears.

"Think again, Richard. Are you sure you never heard my altered name?"

"Never!"

"Don't move your head to look at me, dear Richard. Let it lie here, while I tell my story. I loved a generous, noble man; loved him with my whole heart; loved him for years and years; loved him faithfully, devotedly; loved him with no hope of return; loved him, knowing nothing of his highest qualities—not even knowing that he was alive. He was a brave soldier. He was honoured and beloved by thousands of thousands, when the mother of his dear friend found me and showed me that in all his triumphs he had never forgotten me. He was wounded in a great battle. He was brought, dying, here, into Brussels. I came to watch and tend him, as I would have joyfully gone, with such a purpose, to the dreariest ends of the earth. When he knew no one else, he knew me. When he suffered most, he bore his sufferings barely murmuring, content to rest his head where yours rests now. When he lay at the point of death, he married me, that he might call me Wife before he died. And the name, my dear love, that I took on that forgotten night——"

"I know it now!" he sobbed. "The shadowy remembrance strengthens. It is come back. I thank Heaven that my mind is quite restored! My Mary, kiss me; lull this weary head to rest, or I shall die of gratitude. His parting words were fulfilled. I see Home again!"

Well! They were happy. It was a long recovery, but they were happy through it all. The snow had melted on the ground, and the birds were singing in the leafless thickets of the early spring, when those three were first able to ride out together, and when people flocked about the open carriage to cheer and congratulate Captain Richard Doubledick.

But even then it became necessary for the Captain, instead of returning to England, to complete his recovery in the climate of Southern France. They found a spot upon the Rhône, within a ride of the old town of Avignon, and within view of its broken bridge, which was all they could desire; they lived there, together, six months; then returned to England. Mrs. Taunton, growing old after three years—though not so old as that her bright, dark eyes were dimmed—and remembering that her strength had been benefited by the change, resolved to go back for a year to those parts. So she went with a faithful servant, who had often carried her son in his arms; and she was to be rejoined and escorted home, at the year's end, by Captain Richard Doubledick.

She wrote regularly to her children (as she called them now), and they to her. She went to the neighbourhood of Aix; and there, in their own château near the farmer's house she rented, she grew into intimacy with a family belonging to that part of France. The intimacy began in her often meeting among the vineyards a pretty child, a girl with a most compassionate heart, who was never tired of listening to the solitary English lady's stories of her poor son and the cruel wars. The family were as gentle as the child, and at length she came to know them so well that she accepted their invitation to pass the last month of her residence abroad under their roof. All this intelligence she wrote home, piecemeal as it came about, from time to time; and at last enclosed a polite note, from the head of the château, soliciting, on the occasion of his approaching mission to that neighbourhood, the honour of the company of cet homme si justement célèbre, Monsieur le Capitaine Richard Doubledick.

Captain Doubledick, now a hardy, handsome man in the full vigour of life, broader across the chest and shoulders than he had ever been before, dispatched a courteous reply, and followed it in person. Travelling through all that extent of country after three years of Peace, he blessed the better days on which the world had fallen. The corn was golden, not drenched in unnatural red; was bound in sheaves for food, not trodden underfoot by men in mortal fight. The smoke rose up from peaceful hearths, not blazing ruins. The carts were laden with the fair fruits of the earth, not with wounds and death. To him who had so often seen the terrible reverse, these things were beautiful indeed; and they brought him in a softened spirit to the old château near Aix upon a deep blue evening.

It was a large château of the genuine old ghostly kind, with round towers, and extinguishers, and a high leaden roof, and more windows than Aladdin's Palace. The lattice blinds were all thrown open after the heat of the day, and there were glimpses of rambling walls and corridors within. Then there were immense out-buildings fallen into partial decay, masses of dark trees, terrace-gardens, balustrades; tanks of water, too weak to play and too dirty to work; statues, weeds, and thickets of iron railing that seemed to have overgrown themselves like the shrubberies, and to have branched out in all manner of wild shapes. The entrance doors stood open, as doors often do in that country when the heat of the day is past; and the Captain saw no bell or knocker, and walked in.

He walked into a lofty stone hall, refreshingly cool and gloomy after the glare of a Southern day's travel. Extending along the four sides of this hall was a gallery, leading to suites of rooms; and it was lighted from the top. Still no bell was to be seen.

"Faith," said the Captain halting, ashamed of the clanking of his boots, "this is a ghostly beginning!"

He started back, and felt his face turn white. In the gallery, looking down at him, stood the French officer—the officer whose picture he had carried in his mind so long and so far. Compared with the original, at last—in every lineament how like it was!

He moved, and disappeared, and Captain Richard Doubledick heard his steps coming quickly down into the hall. He entered through an archway. There was a bright, sudden look upon his face, much such a look as it had worn in that fatal moment.

"Monsieur le Capitaine Richard Doubledick? Enchanted to receive him! A thousand apologies! The servants were all out in the air. There was a little fête among them in the garden. In effect, it was the fête day of my daughter, the little cherished and protected of Madame Taunton."

He was so gracious and so frank that Monsieur le Capitaine Richard Doubledick could not withhold his hand. "It is the hand of a brave Englishman," said the French officer, retaining it while he spoke. "I could respect a brave Englishman, even as my foe, how much more as my friend! I also am a soldier."

"He has not remembered me, as I have remembered him; he did not take such note of my face, that day, as I took of his," thought Captain Richard Doubledick. "How shall I tell him?"

The French officer conducted his guest into a garden and presented him to his wife, an engaging and beautiful woman, sitting with Mrs. Taunton in a whimsical old-fashioned pavilion. His daughter, her fair young face beaming with joy, came running to embrace him; and there was a boy-baby to tumble down among the orange trees on the broad steps, in making for his father's legs. A multitude of children visitors were dancing to sprightly music; and all the servants and peasants about the château were dancing too. It was a scene of innocent happiness that might have been invented for the climax of the scenes of peace which had soothed the Captain's journey.

He looked on, greatly troubled in his mind, until a resounding bell rang, and the French officer begged to show him his rooms. They went upstairs into the gallery from which the officer had looked down; and Monsieur le Capitaine Richard Doubledick was cordially welcomed to a grand outer chamber, and a smaller one within, all clocks and draperies, and hearths, and brazen dogs, and tiles, and cool devices, and elegance, and vastness.

"You were at Waterloo," said the French officer.

"I was," said Captain Richard Doubledick. "And at Badajos."

Left alone with the sound of his own stern voice in his ears, he sat down to consider, "What shall I do, and how shall I tell him?" At that time, unhappily, many deplorable duels had been fought between English and French officers, arising out of the recent war; and these duels, and how to avoid this officer's hospitality, were the uppermost thought in Captain Richard Doubledick's mind.

He was thinking, and letting the time run out in which he should have dressed for dinner, when Mrs. Taunton spoke to him outside the door, asking if he could give her the letter he had brought from Mary. "His mother, above all," the Captain thought. "How shall I tell *her?*"

"You will form a friendship with your host, I hope," said Mrs. Taunton, whom he hurriedly admitted, "that will last for life. He is so true-hearted and so generous, Richard, that you can hardly fail to esteem one another. If he had been spared," she kissed (not without tears) the locket in which she wore his hair, "he would have appreciated him with his own magnanimity, and would have been truly happy that the evil days were past which made such a man his enemy."

She left the room; and the Captain walked, first to one window, whence he could see the dancing in the garden, then to another window, whence he could see the smiling prospect and the peaceful vineyards.

"Spirit of my departed friend," said he, "is it through thee these better thoughts are rising in my mind? Is it thou who hast shown me, all the way I have been drawn to meet this man, the blessings of the altered time? Is it thou who hast sent thy stricken mother to me, to stay my angry hand? Is it from thee the whisper comes, that this man did his duty as thou didst—and as I did, through thy guidance, which has wholly saved me here on earth—and that he did no more?"

He sat down, with his head buried in his hands, and, when he rose up, made the second strong resolution of his life—that neither to the French officer, nor to the mother of his departed friend, nor to any soul, while either of the two was living, would he breathe what only he knew. And when he touched that French officer's glass with his own, that day at dinner, he secretly forgave him in the name of the Divine Forgiver of injuries.

Here I ended my story as the first Poor Traveller. But, if I had told it now, I could have added that the time has since come when the son of Major Richard Doubledick, and the son of that French officer, friends as their fathers were before them, fought side by side in one cause, with their respective nations, like long-divided brothers whom the better times have brought together, fast united.

CHAPTER III

THE ROAD

My story being finished, and the Wassail too, we broke up as the Cathedral bell struck Twelve. I did not take leave of my travellers that night; for it had come into my head to reappear, in conjunction with some hot coffee, at seven in the morning.

As I passed along the High-street, I heard the Waits at a distance, and struck off to find them. They were playing near one of the old gates of the City, at the corner of a wonderfully quaint row of red-brick tenements, which the clarionet obligingly informed me were inhabited by the Minor-Canons. They had odd little porches over the doors, like sounding-boards over old pulpits; and I thought I should like to see one of the Minor-Canons come out upon his top step, and favour us with a little Christmas discourse about the poor scholars of Rochester; taking for his text the words of his Master relative to the devouring of Widows' houses.

The clarionet was so communicative, and my inclinations were (as they generally are) of so vagabond a tendency, that I accompanied the Waits across an open green called the Vines, and assisted—in the French sense—at the performance of two waltzes, two polkas, and three Irish melodies, before I thought of my inn any more. However, I returned to it then, and found a fiddle in the kitchen, and Ben, the wall-eyed young man, and two chambermaids, circling round the great deal table with the utmost animation.

I had a very bad night. It cannot have been owing to the turkey or the beef—and the Wassail is out of the question—but in every endeavour that I made to get to sleep I failed most dismally. I was never asleep; and in whatsoever unreasonable direction my mind rambled, the effigy of Master Richard Watts perpetually embarrassed it.

In a word, I only got out of the Worshipful Master Richard Watts's way by getting out of bed in the dark at six o'clock, and tumbling, as my custom is, into all the cold water that could be accumulated for the purpose. The outer air was dull and cold enough in the street, when I came down there; and the one candle in our supper-room at Watts's Charity looked as pale in the burning as if it had had a bad night too. But my Travellers had all slept soundly, and they took to the hot coffee and the piles of bread-and-butter, which Ben had arranged like deals in a timber-yard, as kindly as I could desire.

While it was yet scarcely daylight, we all came out into the street together, and there shook hands. The widow took the little sailor towards Chatham, where he was to find a steamboat for Sheerness; the lawyer, with an extremely knowing look, went his own way, without committing himself by announcing his intentions; two more struck off by the Cathedral and Old Castle for Maidstone; and the Book-Pedlar accompanied me over the bridge. As for me, I was going to walk by Cobham Woods, as far upon my way to London as I fancied.

When I came to the stile and footpath by which I was to diverge from the main road, I bade farewell to my last remaining Poor Traveller, and pursued my way alone. And now the mists began to rise in the most beautiful manner, and the sun to shine; and as I went on through the bracing air, seeing the hoar-frost sparkle everywhere, I felt as if all Nature shared in the joy of the great Birthday.

Going through the woods, the softness of my tread upon the mossy ground and among the brown leaves enhanced the Christmas sacredness by which I felt surrounded. As the whitened stems environed me, I thought how the Founder of the time had never raised his benignant hand, save to bless and heal, except in the case of one unconscious tree. By Cobham Hall, I came to the village, and the churchyard where the dead had been quietly buried, "in the sure and certain hope" which Christmas-time inspired. What children could I see at play, and not be loving of, recalling who had loved them! No garden that I passed was out of unison with the day, for I remembered that the tomb was in a garden, and that "she, supposing him to be the gardener," had said, "Sir, if thou hast borne him hence, tell me where thou hast laid him, and I will take him away." In time, the distant river with the ships came full in view, and with it pictures of the poor fishermen, mending their nets, who arose and followed Him—of the teaching of the people from a ship pushed off a little way from shore, by reason of the multitude—of a majestic figure walking on the water, in the loneliness of night. My very shadow on the ground was eloquent of Christmas; for did not the people lay their sick where the mere shadows of the men who had heard and seen Him might fall as they passed along?

Thus Christmas begirt me, far and near, until I had come to Blackheath, and had walked down the long vista of gnarled old trees in Greenwich Park, and was being steam-rattled through the mists now closing in once more, towards the lights of London. Brightly they shone, but not so brightly as my own fire, and the brighter faces around it, when we came together to celebrate the day. And there I told of worthy Master Richard Watts, and of my supper with the Six Poor Travellers who were neither Rogues nor Proctors, and from that hour to this I have never seen one of them again.

J. SHERIDAN LE FANU

(1814–1873)

JOSEPH SHERIDAN LE FANU entered Trinity College, Dublin, in 1833, and after a course of study, from 1839 devoted himself for some years to journalism. He originated the *Evening Mail* in Dublin, and it was not until 1864 that he published his first novel, *Uncle Silas*. Its success was sufficient to encourage him to continue in this line of work, and twelve other novels, as well as various short pieces, followed between 1865 and 1875. He edited the *Dublin University Magazine* between 1869 and 1872, and his work has been ranked with that of Lever as representing the best of the earlier nineteenth-century Irish novelists.

"The Dream" is reprinted from *The Watcher and Other Weird Stories*.

THE DREAM

DREAMS! What age, or what country of the world, has not felt and acknowledged the mystery of their origin and end? I have thought not a little upon the subject, seeing it is one which has been forced upon my attention, and sometimes strangely enough; and yet I have never arrived at anything which at all appeared a satisfactory conclusion. It does appear that a mental phenomenon so extraordinary cannot be wholly without its use. We know, indeed, that in the olden times it has been made the organ of communication between the Deity and His creatures; and when a dream produces upon a mind, to all appearance hopelessly reprobate and depraved, an effect so powerful and so lasting as to break down the inveterate habits, and to reform the life of an abandoned sinner, we see in the result, in the reformation of morals which appeared incorrigible, in the reclamation of a human soul which seemed to be irretrievably lost, something more than could be produced by a mere chimera of the slumbering fancy, something more than could arise from the capricious images of a terrified imagination. And while Reason rejects as absurd the superstition which will read a prophecy in every dream, she may, without violence to herself, recognise, even in the wildest and most incongruous of the wanderings of a slumbering intellect, the evidences and the fragments of a language which may be spoken, which *has* been spoken, to terrify, to warn, and to command. We have reason to believe too, by the promptness of action which in the age of the prophets followed all intimations of this kind, and by the strength of conviction and strange permanence of the effects resulting from certain dreams in latter times—which effects we ourselves may have witnessed—that when this medium of communication has been employed by the Deity, the evidences of His presence have been unequivocal. My thoughts were directed to this subject in a manner to leave a lasting impression upon my mind, by the events which I shall now relate, the statement of which, however extraordinary, is nevertheless accurate.

About the year 17—, having been appointed to the living of C—h, I rented a small house in the town which bears the same name: one morning in the month of November, I was awakened before my usual time by my servant, who bustled unto my bedroom for the purpose of announcing a sick call. As the Catholic Church holds her last rites to be totally indispensable to the safety of the departing sinner, no conscientious clergyman can afford a moment's unnecessary delay, and in little more than five minutes I stood ready, cloaked and booted for the road, in the small front parlour in which the messenger, who was to act as my guide, awaited my coming. I found a poor little girl crying piteously near the door, and after some slight difficulty I ascertained that her father was either dead or just dying.

"And what may be your father's name, my poor child?" said I. She held down her head as if ashamed. I repeated the question, and the wretched little creature burst into floods of tears still more bitter than she had shed before. At length, almost angered by conduct which appeared to me so unreasonable, I began to lose patience, and I said rather harshly:

"If you will not tell me the name of the person to whom you would lead me, your silence can arise from no good motive, and I might be justified in refusing to go with you at all."

"Oh, don't say that—don't say that!" cried she. "Oh, sir, it was that I was afeard of when I would not tell you—I was afeard, when you heard his name, you would not come with me; but it is no use hidin' it now—it's Pat Connell, the carpenter, your honour."

She looked in my face with the most earnest anxiety, as if her very existence depended upon what she should read there. I relieved the child at once. The name, indeed, was most unpleasantly familiar to me; but, however fruitless my visits and advice might have been at another time, the present was too fearful an occasion to suffer my doubts of their utility, or my reluctance to re-attempting what appeared a hopeless task, to weigh even against the lightest chance that a consciousness of his imminent danger might produce in him a more docile and tractable disposition. Accordingly I told the child to lead the way, and followed her in silence. She hurried rapidly through the long narrow street which forms the great thoroughfare of the town. The darkness of the hour, rendered still deeper by the close approach of the old-fashioned houses, which lowered in tall obscurity on either side of the way; the damp, dreary chill which renders the advance of morning peculiarly cheerless, combined with the object of my walk—to visit the death-bed of a presumptuous sinner, to endeavour, almost against my own conviction, to infuse a hope into the heart of a dying reprobate—a drunkard but too probably perishing under the consequences of some mad fit of intoxication; all these circumstances served to enhance the gloom and solemnity of my feelings, as I silently followed my little guide, who with quick steps traversed the uneven pavement of the Main Street. After a walk of about five minutes, she turned off into a narrow lane, of that obscure and comfortless class which is to be found in almost all small old-fashioned towns, chill, without ventilation, reeking with all manner of offensive effluviæ, and lined by dingy, smoky, sickly, and pent-up buildings, frequently not only in a wretched but in a dangerous condition.

"Your father has changed his abode since I last visited him, and, I am afraid, much for the worse," said I.

"Indeed he has, sir; but we must not complain," replied she. "We have to thank God that we have lodging and food, though it's poor enough, it is, your honour."

Poor child! thought I. How many an older head might learn wisdom from thee—how many a luxurious philosopher, who is skilled to preach but not to suffer, might not thy patient words put to the blush! The manner and language of my companion were alike above her years and station; and, indeed, in all cases in which the cares and sorrows of life have anticipated their usual date, and have fallen, as they sometimes do, with melancholy prematurity to the lot of childhood, I have observed the result to have proved uniformly the same. A young mind, to which joy and indulgence have been strangers, and to which suffering and self-denial have been familiarised from the first, acquires a solidity and an elevation which no other discipline could have bestowed, and which, in the present case, communicated a striking but mournful peculiarity to the manners, even to the voice, of the child. We paused before a narrow crazy door, which she opened by means of a latch, and we forthwith began to ascend the steep and broken stairs which led to the sick man's room.

As we mounted flight after flight towards the garret-floor, I heard more and more distinctly the hurried talking of many voices. I could also distinguish the low sobbing of a female. On arriving upon the uppermost lobby, these sounds became fully audible.

"This way, your honour," said my little conductress; at the same time, pushing open a door of patched and half-rotten plank, she admitted me into the squalid chamber of death and misery. But one candle, held in the fingers of a scared and haggard-looking child, was burning in the room, and that so dim that all was twilight or darkness except within its immediate influence. The general obscurity, however, served to throw into prominent and startling relief the death-bed and its occupant. The light fell with horrible clearness upon the blue and swollen features of the drunkard. I did not think it possible that a human countenance could look so terrific. The lips were black and drawn apart; the teeth were firmly set; the eyes a little unclosed, and nothing but the whites appearing. Every feature was fixed and livid, and the whole face wore a ghastly and rigid expression of despairing terror such as I never saw equalled. His hands were crossed upon his breast, and firmly clenched; while, as if to add to the corpse-like effect of the whole, some white cloths, dipped in water, were wound about the forehead and temples.

As soon as I could remove my eyes from this horrible spectacle, I observed my friend Dr. D——, one of the most humane of a humane profession, standing by the bedside. He had been attempting, but unsuccessfully, to bleed the patient, and had now applied his finger to the pulse.

"Is there any hope?" I inquired in a whisper.

A shake of the head was the reply. There was a pause, while he continued to hold the wrist; but he waited in vain for the throb of life—it was not there: and when he let go the hand, it fell stiffly back into its former position upon the other.

"The man is dead," said the physician, as he turned from the bed where the terrible figure lay.

Dead! thought I, scarcely venturing to look upon the tremendous and revolting spectacle. Dead! without an hour for repentance, even a moment for reflection. Dead! without the rites which even the best should have. Was there a hope for him? The glaring eyeball, the grinning mouth, the distorted brow—the unutterable look in which a painter would have sought to embody the fixed despair of the nethermost hell—these were my answer.

The poor wife sat at a little distance, crying as if her heart would break—the younger children clustered round the bed, looking with wondering curiosity upon the form of death, never seen before.

When the first tumult of uncontrollable sorrow had passed away, availing myself of the solemnity and impressiveness of the scene, I desired the heartstricken family to accompany me in prayer, and all knelt down while I solemnly and fervently repeated some of those prayers which appeared most applicable to the occasion. I employed myself thus in a manner which I trusted was not unprofitable, at least to the living, for about ten minutes; and having accomplished my task, I was the first to arise.

I looked upon the poor, sobbing, helpless creatures who knelt so humbly around me, and my heart bled for them. With a natural transition I turned my eyes from them to the bed in which the body lay; and, great God! what was the revulsion, the horror which I experienced on seeing the corpse-like, terrific thing seated half upright before me. The white cloths which had been wound about the head had now partly slipped from their position, and were hanging in grotesque festoons about the face and shoulders, while the distorted eyes leered from amid them—

A sight to dream of, not to tell.

I stood actually riveted to the spot. The figure nodded its head and lifted its arm, I thought, with a menacing gesture. A thousand confused and horrible thoughts at once rushed upon my mind. I had often read that the body of a presumptuous sinner, who, during life, had been the willing creature of every satanic impulse, had been known, after the human tenant had deserted it, to become the horrible sport of demoniac possession.

I was roused by the piercing scream of the mother, who now, for the first time, perceived the change which had taken place. She rushed towards the bed, but, stunned by the shock and overcome by the conflict of violent emotions, before she reached it she fell prostrate upon the floor.

I am perfectly convinced that had I not been startled from the torpidity of horror in which I was bound by some powerful and arousing stimulant, I should have gazed upon this unearthly apparition until I had fairly lost my senses. As it was, however, the spell was broken—superstition gave way to reason: the man whom all believed to have been actually dead was living!

Dr. D—— was instantly standing by the bedside, and upon examination he found that a sudden and copious flow of blood had taken place from the wound which the lancet had left; and this, no doubt, had effected his sudden and almost preternatural restoration to an existence from which all thought he had been for ever removed. The man was still speechless, but he seemed to understand the physician when he forbade his repeating the painful and fruitless attempts which he made to articulate, and he at once resigned himself quietly into his hands.

I left the patient with leeches upon his temples, and bleeding freely, apparently with little of the drowsiness which accompanies apoplexy. Indeed, Dr. D—— told me that he had never before witnessed a seizure which seemed to combine the symptoms of so many kinds, and yet which belonged to none of the recognised classes; it certainly was not apoplexy, catalepsy, nor *delirium tremens*, and yet it seemed, in some degree, to partake of the properties of all. It was strange, but stranger things are coming.

During two or three days Dr. D—— would not allow his patient to converse in a manner which could excite or exhaust him, with anyone; he suffered him merely as briefly as possible to express his immediate wants. And it was not until the fourth day after my early visit, the particulars of which I have just detailed, that it was thought expedient that I should see him, and then only because it appeared that his extreme importunity and impatience to meet me were likely to retard his recovery more than the mere exhaustion attendant upon a short conversation could possibly do. Perhaps, too, my friend entertained some hope that if by holy confession his patient's bosom were eased of the perilous stuff which no doubt oppressed it, his recovery would be more assured and rapid. It was then, as I have said, upon the fourth day after my first professional call, that I found myself once more in the dreary chamber of want and sickness.

The man was in bed, and appeared low and restless. On my entering the room he raised himself in the bed, and muttered, twice or thrice:

"Thank God! Thank God!"

I signed to those of his family who stood by to leave the room, and took a chair beside the bed. So soon as we were alone, he said, rather doggedly:

"There's no use in telling me of the sinfulness of bad ways—I know it all. I know where they lead to—I have seen everything about it with my own eyesight, as plain as I see you." He rolled himself in the bed, as if to hide his face in the clothes; and then suddenly raising himself, he exclaimed with startling vehemence, "Look, sir! there is no use in mincing the matter: I'm blasted with the fires of hell; I have been in hell. What do you think of that? In hell—I'm lost for ever—I have not a chance. I am damned already—damned—damned!"

The end of this sentence he actually shouted. His vehemence was perfectly terrific; he threw himself back, and laughed, and sobbed hysterically. I poured some water into a teacup, and gave it to him. After he had swallowed it, I told him if he had anything to communicate, to do so as briefly as he could, and in a manner as little agitating to himself as possible; threatening at the same time, though I had no intention of doing so, to leave him at once in case he again gave way to such passionate excitement.

"It's only foolishness," he continued, "for me to try to thank you for coming to such a villain as myself at all. It's no use for me to wish good to you, or to bless you; for such as me has no blessings to give."

I told him that I had but done my duty, and urged him to proceed to the matter which weighed upon his mind. He then spoke nearly as follows:

"I came in drunk on Friday night last, and got to my bed here; I don't remember how. Sometime in the night it seemed to me I wakened, and feeling unasy in myself, I got up out of the bed. I wanted the fresh air; but I would not make a noise to open the window, for fear I'd waken the crathurs. It was very dark and throublesome to find the door; but at last I did get it, and I groped my way out, and went down as asy as I could. I felt quite sober, and I counted the steps one after another, as I was going down, that I might not stumble at the bottom.

"When I came to the first landing-place—God be about us always!—the floor of it sunk under me, and I went down—down—down, till the senses almost left me. I do not know how long I was falling, but it seemed to me a great while. When I came rightly to myself at last, I was sitting near the top of a great table; and I could not see the end of it, if it had any, it was so far off. And there was men beyond reckoning sitting down all along by it, at each side, as far as I could see at all. I did not know at first was it in the open air; but there was a close smothering feel in it that was not natural. And there was a kind of light that my eyesight never saw before, red and unsteady; and I did not see for a long time where it was coming from, until I looked straight up, and then I seen that it came from great balls of blood-coloured fire that were rolling high overhead with a sort of rushing, trembling sound, and I perceived that they shone on the ribs of a great roof of rock that was arched overhead instead of the sky. When I seen this, scarce knowing what I did, I got up, and I said, 'I have no right to be here; I must go.' And the man that was sitting at my left hand only smiled, and said, 'Sit down again; you can *never* leave this place.' And his voice was weaker than any child's voice I ever heard; and when he was done speaking he smiled again.

"Then I spoke out very loud and bold, and I said, 'In the name of God, let me out of this bad place.' And there was a great man that I did not see before, sitting at the end of the table that I was near; and he was taller than twelve men, and his face was very proud and terrible to look at. And he stood up and stretched out his hand before him; and when he stood up, all that was there, great and small, bowed down with a sighing sound; and a dread came on my heart, and he looked at me, and I could not speak. I felt I was his own, to do what he liked with, for I knew at once who he was; and he said, 'If you promise to return, you may depart for a season'; and the voice he spoke with was terrible and mournful, and the echoes of it went rolling and swelling down the endless cave, and mixing with the trembling of the fire overhead; so that when he sat down there was a sound after him, all through the place, like the roaring of a furnace. And I said, with all the strength I had, 'I promise to come back—in God's name let me go!'

"And with that I lost the sight and the hearing of all that was there, and when my senses came to me again, I was sitting in the bed with the blood all over me, and you and the rest praying around the room."

Here he paused, and wiped away the chill drops which hung upon his forehead.

I remained silent for some moments. The vision which he had just described struck my imagination not a little, for this was long before Vathek and the "Hall of Eblis" had delighted the world; and the description which he gave had, as I received it, all the attractions of novelty beside the impressiveness which always belongs to the narration of an *eyewitness*, whether in the body or in the spirit, of the scenes which he describes. There was something, too, in the stern horror with which the man related these things, and in the incongruity of his description with the vulgarly received notions of the great place of punishment, and of its presiding spirit, which struck my mind with awe, almost with fear. At length he said, with an expression of horrible, imploring earnestness, which I shall never forget:

"Well, sir, is there any hope; is there any chance at all? or is my soul pledged and promised away for ever? is it gone out of my power? must I go back to the place?"

In answering him, I had no easy task to perform; for however clear might be my internal conviction of the groundlessness of his fears, and however strong my scepticism respecting the reality of what he had described, I nevertheless felt that his impression to the contrary, and his humility and terror resulting from it, might be made available as no mean engines in the work of his conversion from profligacy, and of his restoration to decent habits and to religious feeling.

I therefore told him that he was to regard his dream rather in the light of a warning than in that of a prophecy; that our salvation depended not upon the word or deed of a moment, but upon the habits of a life; that, in fine, if he at once discarded his idle companions and evil habits, and firmly adhered to a sober, industrious, and religious course of life, the powers of darkness might claim his soul in vain, for that there were higher and firmer pledges than human tongue could utter, which promised salvation to him who should repent and lead a new life.

I left him much comforted, and with a promise to return upon the next day. I did so, and found him much more cheerful, and without any remains of the dogged sullenness which I suppose had arisen from his despair. His promises of amendment were given in that tone of deliberate earnestness which belongs to deep and solemn determination; and it was with no small delight that I observed, after repeated visits, that his good resolutions, so far from failing, did but gather strength by time; and when I saw that man shake off the idle and debauched companions whose society had for years formed alike his amusement and his ruin, and revive his long-discarded habits of industry and sobriety, I said within myself, There is something more in all this than the operation of an idle dream.

One day, some time after his perfect restoration to health, I was surprised, on ascending the stairs for the purpose of visiting this man, to find him busily employed in nailing down some planks upon the landing-place, through which, at the commencement of his mysterious vision, it seemed to him that he had sunk. I perceived at once that he was strengthening the floor with a view to securing himself against such a catastrophe, and could scarcely forbear a smile as I bid "God bless his work."

He perceived my thoughts, I suppose, for he immediately said:

"I can never pass over that floor without trembling. I'd leave this house if I could, but I can't find another lodging in the town so cheap, and I'll not take a better till I've paid off all my debts, please God; but I could not be asy in my mind till I made it as safe as I could. You'll hardly believe me, your honour, that while I'm working, maybe a mile away, my heart is in a flutter the whole way back, with the bare thoughts of the two little steps I have to walk upon this bit of a floor. So it's no wonder, sir, I'd thry to make it sound and firm with any idle timber I have."

I applauded his resolution to pay off his debts, and the steadiness with which he pursued his plans of conscientious economy, and passed on.

Many months elapsed, and still there appeared no alteration in his resolutions of amendment. He was a good workman, and with his better habits he recovered his former extensive and profitable employment. Everything seemed to promise comfort and respectability. I have little more to add, and that shall be told quickly. I had one evening met Pat Connell, as he returned from his work, and as usual, after a mutual, and on his side respectful salutation, I spoke a few words of encouragement and approval. I left him industrious, active, healthy—when next I saw him, not three days after, he was a corpse.

The circumstances which marked the event of his death were somewhat strange—I might say fearful. The unfortunate man had accidentally met an old friend just returned, after a long absence; and in a moment of excitement, forgetting everything in the warmth of his joy, he yielded to his urgent invitation to accompany him into a public-house, which lay close by the spot where the encounter had taken place. Connell, however, previously to entering the room, had announced his determination to take nothing more than the strictest temperance would warrant.

But oh! who can describe the inveterate tenacity with which a drunkard's habits cling to him through life? He may repent, he may reform, he may look with actual abhorrence upon his past profligacy; but amid all this reformation and compunction, who can tell the moment in which the base and ruinous propensity may not recur, triumphing over resolution, remorse, shame, everything, and prostrating its victim once more in all that is destructive and revolting in that fatal vice?

The wretched man left the place in a state of utter intoxication. He was brought home nearly insensible, and placed in his bed. The younger part of the family retired to rest much after their usual hour; but the poor wife remained up sitting by the fire, too much grieved and shocked at the occurrence of what she had so little expected, to settle to rest. Fatigue, however, at length overcame her, and she sank gradually into an uneasy slumber. She could not tell how long she had remained in this state; but when she awakened, and immediately on opening her eyes, she perceived by the faint red light of the smouldering turf embers, two persons, one of whom she recognised as her husband, noiselessly gliding out of the room.

"Pat, darling, where are you going?" said she.

There was no answer—the door closed after them: but in a moment she was startled and terrified by a loud and heavy crash, as if some ponderous body had been hurled down the stair.

Much alarmed, she started up, and going to the head of the staircase, she called repeatedly upon her husband, but in vain.

She returned to the room, and with the assistance of her daughter, whom I had occasion to mention before, she succeeded in finding and lighting a candle, with which she hurried again to the head of the staircase.

At the bottom lay what seemed to be a bundle of clothes, heaped together, motionless, lifeless—it was her husband. In going down the stairs, for what purpose can never now be known, he had fallen helplessly and violently to the bottom, and coming head foremost, the spine of the neck had been dislocated by the shock, and instant death must have ensued.

The body lay upon that landing-place to which his dream had referred.

It is scarcely worth endeavouring to clear up a single point in a narrative where all is mystery; yet I could not help suspecting that the second figure which had been seen in the room by Connell's wife on the night of his death might have been no other than his own shadow.

I suggested this solution of the difficulty; but she told me that the unknown person had been considerably in advance of her husband, and on reaching the door, had turned back as if to communicate something to his companion.

It was, then, a mystery.

Was the dream verified?—whither had the disembodied spirit sped? who can say? We know not. But I left the house of death that day in a state of horror which I could not describe. It seemed to me that I was scarce awake. I heard and saw everything as if under the spell of a nightmare. The coincidence was terrible.

CHARLES READE

(1814–1884)

CHARLES READE was born in 1814, and was, by 1831, Demy of Magdalen College, Oxford. In 1835 he was elected a Fellow, and was a Vinerian scholar in the same year. If, thus equipped, he brought ripe scholarship to his work it was never marred by the intrusion of the academic or the pedantic, but remained robust and full-blooded throughout his long writing career. In 1836 he entered Lincoln's Inn, and was called to the Bar in 1843. In 1851 he became vice-president of his college, and remained a Fellow, maintaining his rooms there until his death in 1884. His best known works are *The Cloister and the Hearth* (1861), *Peg Woffington* (1852), and *It's Never too Late to Mend* (1856), in addition to which he was responsible for many other novels, many of them written with a purpose; plays; adaptations; and short stories.

"There's Many a Slip 'Twixt the Cup and the Lip" is reprinted from *Good Stories of Man and Other Animals.*

"THERE'S MANY A SLIP 'TWIXT THE CUP AND THE LIP"

CHAPTER I

MR. SAMUEL SUTTON, wool-stapler, had a large business in Frome, inherited from his father, and enlarged by himself; also a nest-egg of £150,000 invested at four per cent. in solid securities. He lived clear out of the town in a large house built by himself, and called Merino Lodge, with lawns, gardens, conservatories, stables, all of them models. He loved business, and spent his day in the office; he loved his wife, and enjoyed his evenings at home. But this life of calm content was broken up in one month; his wife sickened and died, leaving him utterly desolate and wretched. No child to reflect her beloved features, and no live thing to cherish but her favourite dog, an orphan girl she had taken into the house eight years before, and the immortal memory of a watchful and unselfish affection.

Under this stunning blow messages of consolation poured in upon him, many of them delicately and admirably worded, all written with a certain sympathy, but with dry eyes. His very servants spoke with bated breath and sorrowful looks before him, but he heard the squawks of the women and the guffaws of the men out in the yard. Only one creature beside himself suffered. It was his wife's *protégée*, Rebecca Barnes. For many a day this girl, like himself, never smiled, and often burst into tears all in a moment over her work. This was not lost on the mourner; hitherto he had hardly noticed this humble figure; but now he looked at her with interest, and told her once for all he would be a friend to her, as his beloved wife had been.

The young woman, thus distinguished, was attractive; she was tall and straight, but not bony, nor nipped in at the waist. She had the face of an English rural beauty: light brown hair, a very white skin, dark grey eyes, and a complexion not divided into red and white, but with a light brick-dusty colour, very sweet and healthy, diffused all over two oval cheeks; a large but shapely mouth and beautiful teeth made her winning; a little cocked-up nose spoiled her for beauty; and she might be summed up as comely in person.

Educated by a lady with great good sense, she could read aloud fluently and with propriety, could write like a clerk, cook well, make pickles and preserves, sweep, dust, cut and sew dresses, iron and get up lace and linen; but could not play the piano nor dance a polka.

Mrs. Sutton always intended her to be housekeeper; and the widower now told her to try and qualify herself in time; she was too young at present.

Months rolled on, but Samuel Sutton's loneliness did not abate. He had only one relation who interested him: Joe Newton, son of a deceased sister, a bold Eton boy he had often tipped. Joe was now at Oxford, and Mr. Sutton invited him for the long vacation, and prepared to like him.

While he is on the road, let us attempt his character at that period: a goodish scholar, excellent athlete; rowed six in the college boat, and was promised a place in the University Eleven for fair defense, hard hitting, and exceptional throwing.

He used to back himself against both the universities to fling the hammer and construe Demosthenes; the college tutor heard and remonstrated. "It was not the thing at Oxford to brag; why, Stilwell made a hundred and fifteen against Surrey the other day, but he only said he had been very *lucky*. That is the form at present," said the excellent tutor, stroke of the university boat in his day. Joe explained largely. Of course he knew there were two men who could beat him at throwing the hammer, one Oxford, one Cambridge, and a lot who could eclipse him at construing Greek orators. "But you see, sir," said he slyly, "the fellows that can construe Demosthenes can't fling the hammer; and the happy pair that can take the shine out of me at the hammer can't construe Demosthenes. I can do both after a fashion."

"Oh," said the tutor, "that alters the case. So it was only an enigma; sounded like a brag."

Add to the virtues indicated above: pugilism, wrestling, good spirits, six feet, broad shoulders, abundance of physical, and a want of moral, courage, and behold Joe Newton, aged twenty-one.

He came to Merino Lodge, and filled the place with sudden vitality. He rowed everybody on the lake; armed both sexes with fishing-rods; mowed and rolled a paddock into a cricket ground, organised matches between county clubs; drew on his uncle for copious luncheons, chaffed, talked, and enlivened all the family and the neighbourhood, and gazed at Rebecca Barnes till he troubled her peace, and set her heart in a flutter.

One fine summer evening there was a harvest-home supper, and the rustics drank the farmer's cider without stint. Returning from this banquet, a colossal carter met Rebecca Barnes and proceeded to some very rough courtship. She gave him the slip and ran and screamed a little. It was near the cricket-ground that Joe was rolling for a match to come off. He heard the signals of distress, and vaulted over the gate in front of Rebecca, just as the carter caught her, and she screamed violently.

"Come, drop that, my man," said Joe, good-humouredly enough.

"Who be you?" inquired the rustic disdainfully, and challenged him to fight.

"No, don't, sir, pray don't," cried Rebecca. "He is bigger than you, and he thrashes them all."

Joseph hesitated out of good nature. The bully called him a coward, and took off his coat. Joseph said apologetically:

"He wants a lesson. I won't detain you a minute. Now, then, sir, let us get it over." And without taking off his coat, put himself in his favourite attitude. The carter made a rush, got it right and left as if from Heaven, and stood staring with two black eyes; came on again more cautiously, but, while endeavouring a tremendous rounder that would probably have finished the business his way, received a dazzler with the left, followed by a heavy right-hander on the throat that felled him like a tree.

Joe then gave his arm to Rebecca, who was trembling all over. She took it with both hands, and an inclination to droop her head on his shoulder, which made the walk home slow, amusing, and delightful to Joe.

After that evening, Rebecca, who was already on the verge of danger, began to be divinely happy and unreasonably depressed by turns. She was always peeping at Joe, and coming near him, and avoiding him; and then he took to spooning upon her, and she was coy, but fluttered with wild hopes, and thrilled with innocent joys.

At last energetic Joe spooned on her so openly that Mr. Sutton observed.

He made short work with both culprits.

"Rebecca," said he, "be good enough to keep that young fool at a distance. Joe, let that girl alone. She is only a servant, after all, and I will not have her head turned."

Rebecca blushed and cried and tried to obey.

Joe affected compliance, got impatient, and one day watched for Rebecca, caught her away from home, declared his love for her, and urged her to run away with him.

The instinct of virtue supplied the place of experience, and she rejected him with indignation, and after that kept out of his way in earnest.

However, before he left he owned his fault, begged her pardon, and asked her to wait for him till he got his family living, and was independent of everybody.

This was another matter, and female love soon forgives mild audacity. Reckless Joe overcame her reasonable misgivings, and fed her passion by letters for three whole years, and she refused young Farmer Mortlock, an excellent match in every way.

By-and-by Joe's letters cooled and became rare. He even declined his uncle's invitations on pretence of reading with a tutor in Wales.

Then Rebecca paled and pined, and divined that she was abandoned. Soon cruel suspense gave way to certainty. Joe was ordained priest, took the family living, and married Melusina Florence Tiverton, a young lady of fashion, high connections, and eight thousand pounds which, before the marriage, was settled on her and her children.

Mr. Sutton announced this to his friends with satisfaction, and he even told it to Rebecca Barnes, whom he happened to find at a passage window sewing buttons on his shirts. He was fond of Joe, and thought his good marriage ought to please everybody, and so he was in a good humour, and told Rebecca all about it, and that he had promised the happy pair a thousand pounds to start with.

Rebecca turned cold as a stone, and kept on sewing, but slower and slower every stitch.

"Well, you might wish them joy," said Mr. Sutton.

"I wish—them—every—happiness," said Rebecca, slowly and faintly, and went on sewing mechanically.

Mr. Sutton looked at her inquiringly, but had already said more to her than was his custom at that period of her service, so he went about his business.

She sewed on still, feeling very cold, and soon the patient tears began to trickle, and then she put her work aside, and laid her brow against the corner of the shutter that the tears might run their course without spoiling her master's collars and cuffs.

Not long after this the housekeeper left, and Mr. Sutton sent for Rebecca. "You are young," he said, half hesitating, "but you are steady and faithful." Then he turned his back on her and looked at his wife's portrait. "Yes, Jane," said he, "we can but try her." Then, without turning from the picture, "Rebecca, take the housekeeper's keys, and let us see how you can govern my house."

"I will try, sir," said she; then curtsied and left the room, with the tear in her eye at him consulting the picture of her they both loved.

Rebecca Barnes had made many observations upon servants and their ways, and entered on office with some fixed ideas of economy and management.

She did not hurry matters, but by degrees waste was quietly put down, the servants were compelled, contrary to their nature, to return everything to its place; the weekly bills decreased, and yet the donations to worthy people increased.

She had held the keys, and nearly doubled their number, about eight months, when Mr. Sutton gave her an order. "Barnes," said he, "Joe and his wife are coming to see me next Wednesday at five o'clock. Get everything ready for them at once—give them the best bedroom—and make them comfortable."

"Yes, sir," said she, and went about it directly.

She summoned maids, saw fires lit, beds and blankets put down to them, not sheets only; took linen out of her lavender cupboard, ordered flowers, and secured the comfort of the visitors, though heats and chills pervaded her own body by turns at the thought of receiving Joe Newton and the woman he had preferred to herself. "She is beautiful, no doubt," thought Rebecca. "I wonder whether she knows? Oh, no; surely he would never tell her. He would be ashamed." The mere doubt, though, made her red and then pale.

The pair arrived with their own maid; a housemaid under orders showed them to their rooms; Rebecca Barnes kept out of their way at first, and steeled herself by degrees to the inevitable encounter.

She took her opportunity next day, and approached Mrs. Newton first with a civil inquiry if she could do anything for her.

"You are the—the——" drawled the lady.

"The housekeeper, madam."

"The housekeeper? You are very young for that."

"Not so young as I look, perhaps; and I have been sixteen years in the house." She then renewed her question.

"Not at present," was the reply. "I will send for you if I require anything."

The words were colourless in themselves, but there was a hard, unfriendly, and superior tone in them rather out of place in a house where she was a guest, and a new one, and kindly civility just being shown her.

Downstairs the lady did not charm. She desired to please, but had not the tact. Her voice was high-pitched, and she could not listen. Her husband, however, was in ecstasy over her, and rather wearied his uncle with descanting on her perfections.

Things went on well enough until she got a little more familiar with Uncle Samuel; and then, looking on him as virtually a bachelor, she must needs advise him from the heights of her matronly experience. She told him his housekeeper was too young for the place.

"She *is* young," said he, "but she has experience, and my dear wife taught her."

Instead of listening to that, and saying, "Ah, that alters the case," as most men or women would, this tactless young lady went on to say that she was too young and good-looking to be about a widower. It would set people talking, and so she strongly advised him to change her for some staid, respectable person.

"Mind your own business, my dear," replied the wool-stapler, with such contemptuous resolution that she held her tongue directly, and contented herself just then with hating Rebecca Barnes for this repulse; but when she got hold of Joe, she scolded him well for the affront; she never saw she had drawn it on herself. It was not in her nature to see a fault in herself under any circumstances whatever.

Joe, physical hero, moral coward, dared not say a word, but took his unjust punishment meekly.

However, after dinner, owning to himself that this infallible creature had made a blunder, he set himself to remove any ill impression. He descanted on her virtues, above all, her generosity and her zeal for her friends' interests, etc.

Uncle Sutton got sick of his marital mendacity, and said, "Now, Joe, don't you be an uxorious ass. She is your wife, and she is well enough; but she is no paragon." And so he shut *him* up.

They stayed a fortnight and then went home. As Melusina had intruded her opinion on Rebecca, Mr. Sutton, who came more into contact with the latter now she was housekeeper, had the sly curiosity to ask her, in a half-careless way, what she thought of Joe's wife.

"Well, sir," said Rebecca, wiser and more on her guard than Melusina, "he might have done better, I think, and he might have done worse."

"Voice too shrill for me," said the master. "But I suppose he took her for her good looks."

"Good looks, sir! What, with a beak for a nose and a slit for a mouth?"

Mr. Sutton laughed. "How you women do admire one another. Stop; now I think of it, this is ungrateful of you, for she told me you were too good-looking."

"Too good-looking!" said Rebecca. "What did she mean by that? Ah! she wanted you to part with me."

"Stuff and nonsense," said he; but he coloured a little at the abominable shrewdness of females in reading one another at half a word.

Rebecca was too discreet to press the matter; she pretended to accept the disavowal, but she did not. Joe's wife to come into the house on her first visit, and instantly endeavour to turn out the poor girl that had been there from a child!

"And he could look on and let her," said she; "he that thought it little to defend me against that giant. Men are so strange, and hard to understand."

Next year Joe came by himself, and charmed everybody. Rebecca at last kept out of his way, for she found the old affection reviving, and was frightened.

Two years more, and the pair came on a visit at one day's notice. But all was ready for them in that well-ordered house.

The motive of this hasty visit soon transpired. They had spent more than double their income since they married, owed two thousand pounds, and had an execution in the house. Uncle Sutton was displeased. "Debt is dishonest," said he. "We can all cut our coat according to our cloth." But he ended by saying, "Well, make out a list of all the debts. Try if you can tell the truth now, both of you, and put them all down."

By this time Rebecca had become his accountant in private matters, and her fidelity and discretion had gradually earned his confidence. He actually consulted her on the situation—not that she could have influenced him against his own judgment. No man was more thoroughly master than Sam Sutton. But he was a solitary man, and it is hard to be always silent.

"Bad business, Rebecca. Now I wonder what you would do in my place?"

"Do, sir? Why, pay Master Joe's debts directly. You will never miss it. But when I *had* paid them, I'd tell her not to come begging here again with a fortune on her back."

"Come, come," said Sutton, "she is dressed plainer than any lady in Frome. I will say that for her."

"La, sir! where are your eyes? What! with those furs and that old point lace? Three hundred guineas never bought them. There are no such furs in Frome. I've seen their fellows in London. They are Russian sables, the finest to be had for money. And look at her fingers, crippled with diamonds and rubies. There's four or five hundred more, and that is how Master Joe's money goes. I pity him; he couldn't have done worse if he had married—a servant."

Mr. Sutton looked very grave. However, he sold out and drew the cheque. But, unfortunately, instead of lecturing the wife, he took the husband to task. He said he was sorry to see Mrs. Joseph so extravagant in dress.

"My dear uncle," replied he, "why, she is anything but that; she is most self-denying. I am the only one to blame, believe me."

"Now, you uxorious humbug," cried Uncle Samuel, "can't you see she has got three hundred guineas on her back in lace and sable furs, and as much more on her fingers? Where are your eyes?"

Joe looked sheepish. "I am no judge of these things, uncle; but I feel sure you are mistaken."

"No, I am not mistaken. Everybody knows the value of sables and diamonds."

Joe retailed this conversation very timidly to his wife, not to make her less extravagant, but more cautious under Uncle Sutton's eyes. He took care to draw that distinction for the sake of peace.

His finesse was wasted. "It's the woman," said she, as quick as lightning.

"What woman?"

"The woman Barnes. She has told him—to make mischief."

"No, no; the old fox has got eyes of his own."

"Not for sables. It is the woman."

"Well, dear, I don't think so; but if it is, then I wouldn't give her the chance again."

"Me take off my sables because a woman is envious of them? *What do you think I bought them for?* I'll wear them all the more—ten times more."

"Hush! hush!" implored the weak husband, for the peacock voice, raised in defiance, was audible through doors at a considerable distance.

All this mortified Mrs. Joe's vanity, and that was her strongest passion. She came no more to Merino Lodge.

But she sent her husband once a year with orders to bring home some money, and get rid of the woman Barnes.

He was to tell Mr. Sutton that Barnes was a mercenary woman, and kept his wife away. But Joe's subservience relaxed when he got to Merino Lodge and his pea-hen could not watch him. He made himself agreeable to everybody.

One fine day he discovered that Rebecca was consulted in matters of domestic account, and that he owed the cheque he always took home in some degree to her good word as well as to his uncle's affection. Upon that he forgot he was to undermine her, and began to spoon a little on her; but this was received with a sort of shudder that brought him to his senses.

So the years rolled on, confirming the virtues and the faults of all these characters, for nothing stands still.

Joe Newton was forty-one and looked forty-five; Rebecca Barnes thirty-eight, and looked twenty-five. Mrs. Newton was forty, and looked fifty; and Uncle Sutton, though fifty-seven, looked five-and-forty, thanks to sober living, good humour, and a fine constitution.

Joe's inheritance seemed distant, and he was always in debt, though often relieved.

But who can foretell? The stout wool-stapler was seized with a mysterious malady, frequent sickness, constant depression. He struggled manfully, went to his office ill, came back no better, but at last had to stay at home.

By and by he took to his bed.

Rebecca wrote to Joe Newton. He came and found his uncle eternally sick, and turning yellow.

Joe spoke hopefully, said it was only jaundice, but went away and told a different tale at home.

There he and his wife, demoralised by debt, discussed the approaching death of a great benefactor in hypocritical terms, through which eager expectation pierced.

"You are sure he has not made a fresh will? That woman has his ear."

"Make your mind easy, dear. He told me all about it himself not six months ago. He leaves us and our children all his money, except five thousand pounds to Rebecca Barnes."

"Five thousand pounds to a servant?"

"And only two hundred thousand pounds to us!" said Joe, hazarding a little humour.

"Tied up, I'll be bound."

"Well, dear," said Joe, "even if it should be, our children will benefit, and we shall have enough."

"Five thousand pounds to that woman! And not tied up, of course."

Joe could have told her from his uncle's own lips why he was to have a life-interest only in that large fortune. "Your wife is vain, selfish, and extravagant, and you are her slave. She shall not waste my money as she has yours. It is all secured to you and your children."

But Joe preferred peace to admonition, and kept his uncle's reasons to himself.

Mr. Sutton was tenderly nursed night and day by Rebecca Barnes and a young orphan girl she had brought into the house, as she herself had been brought thirty years ago. He was attended by Dr. Stevenson, an old friend.

But neither physic nor nursing could stop the fatal sickness that prostrated the strong man.

At last Dr. Stevenson and a physician he had summoned from London told Rebecca to prepare for the worst. He must die of inanition, and that shortly.

Rebecca sent a mounted messenger to Joe: "Come at once, or you will not see him alive."

Joe sent back word he would come by the first train.

But before he went his wife gave him instructions: "Now mind, if he knows you, and can speak, do nothing. But if he is insensible, you must begin to think of your interests; you are executor; you told me so."

"One of them."

"And the one on the spot. There are quantities of plate and valuables in the house. You must fix seals, and ask Barnes for her keys."

"Will not that be premature?"

"No, stupid; it will be just in time."

"Hum! she has been a faithful servant. I am afraid it would wound her feelings."

"The feelings of a menial! Besides, there are two ways of doing these things. Of course you will flatter her, and say you only want to relieve her of responsibility. But mind you secure her keys, or I'll never forgive you."

"Very well," said Joe. "I suppose you are right; *you always are.*"

He reached the Lodge, and Rebecca met him with a despairing cry, "Oh, Mr. Joseph!" and led the way to the sick room.

They found Mr. Sutton yellow and yet cadaverous, gasping and almost rattling for breath.

"He is dying," said Joe, awestruck. "He will not live an hour."

Presently the patient gasped desperately and tried to raise himself.

"Lift him!" cried Rebecca, and seized a basin, while Joe's strong arm raised him.

Instantly there burst from the patient a copious discharge of black blood, or what looked like it.

Joe turned pale, and cried, "Oh, it is the substance of the liver," and he felt faint at the sight.

Rebecca stood firm. She gave the basin quickly to the girl, and filled Joe a glassful of neat brandy. He tossed it off, and it revived him.

They lay the patient back gently, and Rebecca felt his pulse. It was scarcely perceptible.

"He is going," she said. Then, looking round in despair, she seized a tablespoon, filled it with brandy, slightly diluted, and opening his mouth, placed the spoon at the root of the tongue, and so got the contents down his throat.

As he retained it, she repeated the dose three times.

The patient lay motionless, no longer gasping, but just faintly breathing, as men do before life's little candle flickers out.

They sat down on each side of him in silence. He had been a good friend to both.

By and by Joe's dinner was announced. He asked Rebecca to come down and eat a morsel with him.

Rebecca was hospitable, but could not leave the moribund even for a moment. "No," said she; "I saw *her* die, and I must see *him* die."

Joe assured her he would not die till night, and said he could not eat alone.

Accustomed to oblige, Rebecca consented, though unwillingly. She summoned an elderly woman that was in the house, and bade her watch him with the young girl, and send down to her the moment there was any change.

Then she went reluctantly, and sat down opposite Joseph Newton, pale and woebegone. He had recovered himself, and ate a tolerable dinner. She tried, out of complaisance, but could only get a morsel or two down.

After a hasty meal, and two glasses of port, the Rev. Joseph Newton opened his commission. He began as directed. He dilated upon her long and faithful service, and then told her he knew she was not forgotten, or he would have felt bound to take care of her.

While he delivered these sugar-plums he did not look her in the face, and so did not observe that her eye was fixed on him and never moved.

Having thus prepared the way, he proceeded in a briefer style to say that he was his uncle's executor, and a great responsibility was now about to fall on him; unfortunately, he could not stay here all night to discharge those sad duties, so perhaps it would be as well to intrust him with her keys before he left.

Then Rebecca, who had hitherto been keenly observant and silent, said, very quietly, "Give you my keys, sir? What! do you mistrust me?"

"Of course not; my only object is to relieve you of so great a responsibility, where there are so many servants and so many valuables about."

"Valuables about! That is not my way, sir. There is nothing loose in this house more than I can keep my eye on."

"An excellent system," said Joe warmly. "I promise to follow it. But to do so I must have an executor's power. Come, Rebecca, I must return by the five o'clock train; please oblige me with your keys; the places that have none you and I will seal up together."

Rebecca Barnes rose from the table so straight she seemed six feet high, and the eyes that had watched him like a cat from the first syllable he had uttered flashed lightning at him.

"You have spoken a woman's mind; take a woman's answer. What! you couldn't wait till the breath was out of that poor dear body before you must lay your greedy hands upon his goods."

Joe rose in his turn. "Rebecca, you forget yourself."

"No, I remember too well. Twenty years ago you did your best to ruin me; and, when you couldn't, you trifled with my affections, held me in hand for years, and flung me away without one grain of pity—you broke my heart, and made me a servant for life. Now you insult the faithful servant, you that were false to the faithful lover. Trust you with my keys, you false-hearted— No, sir." And she folded her arms superbly. "Go back to your wife and tell her if she wants to *rob* him she must *kill* him first, and me too; for while he lives I am mistress of this house, and she and you are—NOBODY."

Then she turned her back on him as only a tall disdainful woman can, and flew wildly upstairs to her dying master.

CHAPTER II

AFTER all, once in twenty years is not often to vent one's outraged feelings, and those who smother their fiery wrongs too long owe nature an explosion.

But Rebecca Barnes, though wild with passion, was by nature anything but a virago. So, even as she flew up the stairs, the rain followed the thunder, and it was in a wild distress, not fury, she darted into her master's room, hurried the other women out of it, and flung herself on her knees by his side. "Oh, master, master!" she cried; "is it come to this? They wish you dead! They want your plate; they want your china; they want your money; they don't want you. For all the good you have done only one poor woman will shed a tear for you." Then she began to mumble his hand and wet it with her honest tears.

"Now I understand my dream," said a calm, faint voice that seemed to come from the other world.

Rebecca sprang to her feet with a scream, and eyed him keenly.

"You are better."

"I am. There was something growing inside me. I always said so. It has broken. I feel lighter now."

Rebecca flung herself on her knees again.

"Oh, master! then don't give in. Try, try, try, and you'll get well. If you won't get well to please poor me, do pray get well to spite those heartless creatures. They couldn't wait. They demanded my keys, they were so hot to take possession."

"Joe and his wife?"

"Put her first; he is her slave. He has no heart or conscience when she gives the order. But let's, you and I, baffle them. Let us get well."

"I mean to," said he slowly, "so where's the sense of your sobbing and crying like that?"

"Dear heart, what can I do? The fear of losing you—the affront—my anger—my hope—my joy—of course I must cry. Oh! oh! oh! La! how you smell of brandy."

"Ay, brandy has been my best friend. I drank about a pint while you were downstairs."

"Oh, goodness gracious me! a pint of brandy!"

"Tell ye it saved me. I'm sleepy."

He went off to sleep. Rebecca covered him up warm and fanned him gently. He slept some hours, and on awaking asked for brandy and yolk of egg. He took this at intervals.

Dr. Stevenson came, examined and felt him all over, and found him full of vital warmth, looked at what had come from him, and said, "Better an empty house than a bad tenant." In a word, pronounced him out of danger.

During his convalescence, Mr. Sutton talked more to Rebecca than he had ever done, and told her that at one time he never expected to live. "For," said he solemnly, "I was as near my dear wife as I am to you. I could not see her, unfortunately, but she spoke to me."

"Oh, sir, tell me; you'll tell *me*. I loved her; I had reason."

"Yes, I will tell *you*," said he. "She said, 'Not now, Samuel. There was only one woman shed a tear for me, and only one will shed a tear for you.' " He reflected a little. "Now I think of it, that was bidding me to live this time. Yes, Jenny, my love, I'll live and teach some folk a lesson—they have taught *me* one."

He ordered Rebecca to write and ask his lawyer to come to him at once with two witnesses.

Rebecca had cooled by this time, and began to be a little alarmed at the turn things were taking; so she said she had been a good deal put out about the keys, and he must not take to heart every word an angry woman said.

"Mind your own business," was his reply. "Write as I bade you."

The lawyer came with his witnesses. Rebecca retired.

When she reappeared she seemed so uneasy that he said to her, "You needn't look as if you had robbed a church. I have not disinherited Joe."

"I am right down glad of that."

"But I have cut him down a bit, and I have changed my executor. Now please remember—the next time I die—*you* are my sole executor; and your keys never leave you."

She cast a beaming look of affection and gratitude on him. He had applied the right salve to her wound. She belonged to a sex that does not always weigh things in our balances. She was not very greedy of money, but to take her keys from her was to dishonour her in her office.

It was soon public that Mr. Sutton had made a new will—contents unknown. Lawyers do not reveal such secrets spontaneously.

"We are disinherited," cried Joe's wife; "and by that woman Barnes. I always warned you how it would end; but you never would get rid of her. We have you to thank for it, the children and I."

Joe resisted for once. "No," he said, "it is all your doing. She would have let you alone if you had let her alone. But you were in such a hurry to insult her you could not wait till it was safe."

What ho! Mutiny! Rebellion! And by the head of the house, paragon of submission hitherto! Mrs. Joe went into a fury, and threatened to leave him and take the children—a menace I would have welcomed with rapture: but it ended in his apologising for his gleam of reason.

When Mr. Sutton had kept them on tenterhooks for a month or more, and was in better health than ever he had been, he instructed his lawyers to answer the questions of coarse or interested curiosity, and it soon became public that he had made an equal division, half to his nephew's family, with life-interest to Joseph himself, and half to Rebecca Barnes and her heirs for ever, the said Rebecca being his wife's *protégée*, and his faithful housekeeper and nurse.

Joe liked this much better than being disinherited. "Come, Melly," said he, "blood is thicker than water. I am content. A hundred thousand pounds is not starvation."

Mrs. Joe, however, did not seem to think so; at least she complained rather louder than before. "To share our inheritance with a menial," said she, and repeated this in more places than one. She even inoculated Dr. Stevenson with this gentle phrase, and prevailed on him to offer friendly advice to his late patient, and gave him hints what to say. Mrs. Joe was his best client, being full of imaginary disorders, so he adopted her course; called on Mr. Sutton, was heartily welcomed, promised him thirty years more, and then took the liberty of an old friend to advise him. Joe had a young family. The division was not equal, and would it not be a pity to leave disproportionate wealth to a menial?

"A menial?" inquired Sutton, affecting innocent ignorance of his meaning.

"Well, it is a harsh term, but it is what people are saying just now, and would say louder over your tombstone; and, after all, whoever you pay wages to is a menial, and if large fortunes are left to them, especially females, why, somehow, it always makes scandal, and throws discredit on an honoured name. I hope you will not be angry with me for speaking freely—we are old friends."

Mr. Sutton seemed to ponder. "I am afraid you are right. It is too much money to leave to a *menial*." Then, suddenly—"Seen Joe and his wife lately?"

"I saw them only yesterday," said the doctor, off his guard. "May I venture to tell them you will reconsider the matter?"

"Not from me. But you can tell who you like that, on second thoughts, I ought not to make a *menial* my executor."

"You are right. And I suppose you will not leave such a very large fortune——"

"To a *menial?* No."

The doctor went away pleased at his influence. Mr. Sutton rang the bell, and bade a servant send Rebecca to him.

When she came he handed her a draft for one hundred pounds, and told her she must get a wedding dress ready-made, and waste no time, for she was to be married right off by special license.

"Me!" said she, staring, and then blushing. "Never."

"Next Monday at half-past ten," said he calmly.

"No, sir," said she resolutely. "I'll never leave my master. I always respected you, and now—I have nursed you. I— Don't ask me to leave you—for I won't. Forgive me. I cannot. How could I? The idea!"

"Who asks you, goose? It is me you have got to marry."

"You, sir?" She blushed like a girl, she laughed, she looked at him to see if he were in earnest; then she said, "Well, I never!"

"Come, Becky," said he, "you are a woman now; don't waste time like a girl."

"I *am* a woman," said she, "and too much your friend to do this foolishness. What's the use? I shall never leave you, whether or no. And finely the folk would talk if you were to marry your servant. See how they always do on such occasion. "No, sir; if you will be ruled by me for *once*" (she had been guiding him for years), "you you will let well alone. As a servant you have got a very good bargain in Becky Barnes; but I should be a bad bargain as a wife."

"Don't you—teach me—my business—Becky Barnes," said the master severely. "I have been making bargains all my life, and never a bad one. 'Try 'em before you buy 'em' is a safe rule, and terribly neglected in marriages. I have had you under my eye twenty years in health and sickness. You are a good housekeeper, a tender nurse, a faithful friend, and you are going to be a good wife. Come, you'll have to obey me at last, so don't waste words, and don't waste time."

By this time Rebecca's face was red and her eye moist at such unwonted praise from a man who never exaggerated or flattered.

She looked at him softly, and said, with a pretty air of mock defiance:

"I'll tell everybody you *made* me."

"Say what you like, my dear, and do what I bid you." So then he drew her to him and kissed her; put the draft into her hand, and dispatched her to make her purchases.

Her pride was gratified. The nursing had brought their hearts nearer to each other, and she said to herself:

"After all, what does it matter to *me?* And if *he* is unhappy, why, it will be my fault. He shall not be unhappy."

She made her own wedding dress for fear of unpunctual milliners.

Sunday night she had one cry over the illusions of her youth. It was but a short one. She asked herself if those two men stood before her now which she should take.

"Why, the man, and not the cur."

They were married privately on Monday at half-past ten.

At eleven came by appointment the lawyer and two witnesses. Mrs. Samuel Sutton was sent upstairs to put on her travelling dress. Meantime, Mr. Sutton and the lawyer did business.

"Mr. Dawson, my second will was open to objection. I left too much to a menial."

"Well, sir," said the lawyer, "it was not for me to advise."

"But you agree with me."

"Perfectly."

"Well, then, cancel will two."

"Both wills are cancelled by your marriage, sir."

"Ah! I forgot. Well, draw me a will on the lines of my first. Only, no rigmarole this time. I'm in a hurry. You can charge me for a volume, but put it all in the ace of spades, that's a good soul."

The lawyer consented, and handed Mr. Sutton testament number one to peruse, and reminded him that in that testament the whole property was left to Rev. Joseph Newton and his children—all but five thousand pounds to Rebecca Barnes.

"My menial?"

"Yes. But five thousand pounds was not excessive."

"Not at all, if you knew the two parties. Well, sir, I don't think we can improve on the *form* of that will. Just reverse the provisions, that is all."

The lawyer stared.

"Leave the five thousand pounds to my nephew to play ducks and drakes with, and all my real and personal estate to my wife Rebecca Sutton, and her heirs for ever."

The lawyer stared, bowed, and set to work. Mr. Sutton left him to prepare for his journey, but in a few minutes came back and hurried him.

"Come, polish that off," said he. "We have only half-an-hour to get to the station."

"I could engross it, and send it up to you for signature," suggested the solicitor.

"What, me go by rail intestate? No, thank you."

The will was drawn and attested, and as he signed it Sutton said to the lawyer: "You see I have not left my fortune to a menial"; then bitterly, "nor yet to mercenaries."

The wedded pair dashed up to London. Each looked lovingly at the other on the road, and Sutton said to himself, "I have done this marriage in a vulgar way. She was entitled to more sentiment; and—by Jove! *now I look at her*—she is a duck."

He was right; every woman likes to be courted; and this one deserved it. Well, he first courted her after marriage instead of before; courted her as if she were a complete novelty; presents, nosegays, attentions of every kind; always by her side, and finding her some pleasure or another; and always good-humoured, kind, and courteous in a plain, manly way.

She came back beaming with happiness, and he wore a conquering air that made folks smile.

Sneers flew about at home and abroad, and Mr. Sutton was now and then discomposed.

Rebecca's watchful eye saw it. She never said a word about it, but she ruminated.

One day the study door was ajar, and she heard Mr. Sutton's voice louder than usual. A tradesman was there and had said something blunt; she gathered as much from Mr. Sutton's answer. "Why, here's a to-do because a plain man of business has married his housekeeper that was brought up by his wife; and her father was just what I am, only not so lucky. One would think a duke had gone and married his kitchen wench. Well, yes, I took a peach out of my own garden instead of a prickly pear out of a swell hot-house; and all the better for me, and all the worse for Joe Newton."

Rebecca heard this in passing, turned round and put the tips of the fingers of both hands to her lips and blew the speaker a kiss through the door with an ardour, an abandon, and a grace that would have adorned a lady of distinction.

Next morning she went to work in her way. "My dear," she said gaily, "I wonder whether you would give me a treat?"

"Well, Becky, I am not fond of denying you."

"No, indeed, you over-indulge me. But the truth is, I have a great desire to see foreign countries, if it is agreeable to you, dear."

"Agreeable to me! Why, I have been going to do it these thirty years."

"Oh, I am so glad! Then will you arrange a tour for us—a nice long one?"

Mr. Sutton fell into this without seeing all that lay behind. It was a fair specimen of Rebecca's handiwork. By this means the house was shut up, the satirical servants discharged without a wrangle, and his friends and neighbours taught the value of Samuel Sutton by his absence.

The couple travelled Europe wisely; never bound themselves to leave a place half enjoyed, nor stay in it exhausted. They were eighteen months away, but spent the last six in a lovely villa near the Bois de Boulogne.

They came home with a thumping boy and a Norman nurse, and both parents looked younger than when they went.

The news spread like wildfire.

"They bought that child abroad," said Mrs. Joe.

Alas! for that romantic theory, Rebecca nursed him herself and gloated over him, as mothers will, and fourteen months later produced a lovely girl.

The parents were happy in their children and themselves; both found in their own hearts unsuspected treasures of tenderness.

The wool-stapler was dictatorial in his own house; his wife docile whenever he laid down the law; but, if he directed, she suggested, and he generally went her way, sometimes without knowing it. Under her gentle influence he arranged a large, businesslike system of personal charity, and this increased so as to find them both occupation, and withdraw him by degrees from active trade without subjecting him to *ennui*.

He became a sleeping partner in the wool trade and an active partner in a large scheme of education, and judicious loans and relief, much of which emanated by degrees from an enlarged housekeeper feeling her way, and possessed of administrative ability.

When they drove out together they often sat hand in hand as well as side by side, and one plain friend who saw their ways declared they were a young couple, and he would prove it.

"Aye, prove that, you dog," said Samuel Sutton, laughing.

"Well, I will. 'A man is as old as he feels and a woman's as old as she looks.'"

The proverb was admitted and the application thereof.

After a long struggle between poverty and pride, the Rev. Joseph Newton wrote to his uncle a piteous tale of his young family and begged relief.

He received an answer by return of post:

> My dear Joe:
>
> This sort of thing is in your aunt's department. You had better write to her.

Then there was fury in the house of Newton. Reproaches—defiance. "Apply to that woman—never!"

A few more months and County Court summonses, and Joe was reproached as a bad father, who could not sacrifice his pride to his children's welfare.

So then Joe sent the hat to his aunt. He got a word of comfort and one hundred pounds by return of post. He was melted with gratitude, and said so openly.

Mrs. Joe snubbed him, and said it was a mere drop out of the ocean the woman had robbed them of.

Not a year passed without a contribution of this kind, sometimes unasked, sometimes solicited. Aunt Rebecca drew the cheques, Uncle Samuel connived with a shrug; it was money thrown into a bottomless pit, and he knew it.

Only once did Aunt Rebecca send advice to her dilapidated nephew: "You have enough if you could but be master in your own house."

Which was wasted most, the advice or the money, is a problem to be solved by him who shall have squared the circle.

Years have rolled on, but they are all alive, these little studies; to call them characters might seem presumptuous.

When last seen, Mr. Sutton was eighty, and looked sixty; Joe sixty-two, and looked seventy; Rebecca sixty, and looked forty—thanks to goodness, a nature affectionate, not passionate, and her light brick-dust colour; Mrs. Joseph Newton sixty-one, and looked eighty.

"Scornful dogs eat dirty puddings." She still speaks disdainfully of "that woman," and takes that woman's money, and awaits the decease of Uncle Samuel, and he looks the very man to outlive her.

The title of this story is a fine one, and there are many examples of its truth in history besides the above tale, the leading incident of which is true to the letter. That title, though it reads idiomatic, is but a happy translation. The original is Greek, and comes down to us with an example. To the best of my recollection the ancient legend runs that a Greek philosopher was discoursing to his pupil on the inability of man to foresee the future—aye, even the event of the next minute. The pupil may have, perhaps, granted the uncertainty of the distant future, but he scouted the notion that men could not make sure of immediate and consecutive events. By way of illustration, he proceeded to fill a goblet.

"I predict," said he sneeringly, "that after filling this goblet, the next event will be I shall drink the wine."

Accordingly he filled the goblet. At that moment his servant ran in. "Master, master! a wild boar is in our vineyard!"

The master caught up his javelin directly, and ran out to find the boar and kill him.

He had the luck to find the boar, and attacked him with such spirit that Sir Boar killed him, and the goblet remained filled.

From that incident arose in Greece the saying,

Πολλα μεταξυ πελει κυλικος και χειλεος ακρον.

This has been Englished thus:

There's many a slip
'Twixt the cup and the lip.

And to my mind the superiority of the English language is shown here, for an original writer has always a certain advantage over a translator; yet the English couplet expresses in eleven syllables all that the Greek hexameter says in sixteen; and our couplet, close as it is, can be reduced to seven syllables without weakening or obscuring the sense:

Many a slip
'Twixt cup and lip.

ANTHONY TROLLOPE

(1815–1882)

ANTHONY TROLLOPE was for many years an official of the Post Office. He came of a literary family, for his mother (1780–1863) was a prolific novelist, and his brother, Thomas Adolphus (1810–1892), followed in her footsteps. His first work of fiction, *The Macdermotts of Ballycloran*, appeared in 1847; but it was not an unqualified success. Undismayed, however, he persevered, and during the whole of his life poured out a great stream of fiction, always readable, and at its best admirable. Perhaps his best novels are those comprised in the Barsetshire series, published between 1855 and 1867.

"The O'Conors of Castle Conor, County Mayo" is reprinted from *Tales of All Countries* (1861–3).

THE O'CONORS OF CASTLE CONOR, COUNTY MAYO

I SHALL never forget my first introduction to country life in Ireland, my first day's hunting there, or the manner in which I passed the evening afterwards. Nor shall I ever cease to be grateful for the hospitality which I received from the O'Conors of Castle Conor. My acquaintance with the family was first made in the following manner. But before I begin my story, let me inform my reader that my name is Archibald Green.

I had been for a fortnight in Dublin, and was about to proceed into County Mayo on business which would occupy me there for some weeks. My headquarters would, I found, be at the town of Ballyglass; and I soon learned that Ballyglass was not a place in which I should find hotel accommodation of a luxurious kind, or much congenial society indigenous to the place itself.

"But you are a hunting man, you say," said old Sir P—— C——; "and in that case you will soon know Tom O'Conor. Tom won't let you be dull. I'd write you a letter to Tom, only he'll certainly make you out without my taking the trouble."

I did think at the time that the old baronet might have written the letter for me, as he had been a friend of my father's in former days; but he did not, and I started for Ballyglass with no other introduction to anyone in the county than that contained in Sir P——'s promise that I should soon know Mr. Thomas O'Conor.

I had already provided myself with a horse, groom, saddle and bridle, and these I sent down, *en avant*, that the Ballyglassians might know that I was somebody. Perhaps, before I arrived, Tom O'Conor might learn that a hunting man was coming into the neighbourhood, and I might find at the inn a polite note intimating that a bed was at my service at Castle Conor. I had heard so much of the free hospitality of the Irish gentry as to imagine that such a thing might be possible.

But I found nothing of the kind. Hunting gentlemen in those days were very common in County Mayo, and one horse was no great evidence of a man's standing in the world. Men there, as I learnt afterwards, are sought for themselves quite as much as they are elsewhere;

and though my groom's top-boots were neat, and my horse a very tidy animal, my entry into Ballyglass created no sensation whatever.

In about four days after my arrival, when I was already infinitely disgusted with the little pot-house in which I was forced to stay, and had made up my mind that the people in County Mayo were a churlish set, I sent my horse on to a meet of the fox-hounds, and followed after myself on an open car.

No one but an erratic fox-hunter such as I am—a fox-hunter, I mean, whose lot it has been to wander about from one pack of hounds to another—can understand the melancholy feeling which a man has when he first intrudes himself, unknown by any one, among an entirely new set of sportsmen. When a stranger falls thus as it were out of the moon into a hunt, it is impossible that men should not stare at him and ask who he is. And it is so disagreeable to be stared at, and to have such questions asked! This feeling does not come upon a man in Leicestershire or Gloucestershire, where the numbers are large, and a stranger or two will always be overlooked, but in small hunting fields it is so painful that a man has to pluck up much courage before he encounters it.

We met on the morning in question at Bingham's Grove. There were not above twelve or fifteen men out, all of whom, or nearly all, were cousins to each other. They seemed to be all Toms, and Pats, and Larrys, and Micks. I was done up very knowingly in pink, and thought that I looked quite the thing; but for two or three hours nobody noticed me.

I had my eyes about me, however, and soon found out which of them was Tom O'Conor. He was a fine-looking fellow, thin and tall, but not largely made, with a piercing grey eye, and a beautiful voice for speaking to a hound. He had two sons there also, short, slight fellows, but exquisite horsemen. I already felt that I had a kind of acquaintance with the father, but I hardly knew on what ground to put in my claim.

We had no sport early in the morning. It was a cold, bleak February day, with occasional storms of sleet. We rode from cover to cover, but all in vain. "I am sorry, sir, that we are to have such a bad day, as you are a stranger here," said one gentleman to me. This was Jack O'Conor, Tom's eldest son, my bosom friend for many a year after. Poor Jack! I fear that the Encumbered Estates Court sent him altogether adrift upon the world.

"We may still have a run from Poulnaroe, if the gentleman chooses to come on," said a voice coming from behind with a sharp trot. It was Tom O'Conor.

"Wherever the hounds go, I'll follow," said I.

"Then come on to Poulnaroe," said Mr. O'Conor. I trotted on quickly by his side, and before we reached the cover had managed to slip in something about Sir P—— C——.

"What the deuce!" said he. "What! a friend of Sir P——'s? Why the deuce didn't you tell me so? What are you doing down here? Where are you staying?" etc., etc., etc.

At Poulnaroe we found a fox, but before we did so Mr. O'Conor had asked me over to Castle Conor. And this he did in such a way that there was no possibility of refusing him—or, I should rather say, of disobeying him. For his invitation came quite in the tone of a command.

"You'll come to us of course when the day is over—and let me see; we're near Ballyglass now, but the run will be right away in our direction. Just send word for them to send your things to Castle Conor."

"But they're all about, and unpacked," said I.

"Never mind. Write a note and say what you want now, and go and get the rest to-morrow yourself. Here, Patsey!—Patsey! run into Ballyglass for this gentleman at once. Now don't be long, for the chances are we shall find here." And then, after giving some further hurried instructions, he left me to write a line in pencil to the innkeeper's wife on the back of a ditch.

This I accordingly did. "Send my small portmanteau," I said, "and all my black dress clothes, and shirts, and socks, and all that, and above all my dressing things, which are on the little table, and the satin neck-handkerchief, and whatever you do, mind you send my *pumps*"; and I underscored the latter word; for Jack O'Conor, when his father left me, went on pressing the invitation. "My sisters are going to get up a dance," said he; "and if you are fond of that kind of thing perhaps we can amuse you." Now in those days I was very fond of dancing—and very fond of young ladies too, and therefore glad enough to learn that Tom O'Conor had daughters as well as sons. On this account I was very particular in underscoring the word pumps.

"And hurry, you young divil," Jack O'Conor said to Patsey.

"I have told him to take the portmanteau over on a car," said I.

"All right; then you'll find it there on our arrival."

We had an excellent run, in which I may make bold to say that I did not acquit myself badly. I stuck very close to the hounds, as did the whole of the O'Conor brood; and when the fellow contrived to earth himself, as he did, I received those compliments on my horse, which is the most approved praise which one fox-hunter ever gives to another.

"We'll buy that fellow off you before we let you go," said Peter, the youngest son.

"I advise you to look sharp after your money if you sell him to my brother," said Jack.

And then we trotted slowly off to Castle Conor, which, however, was by no means near to us. "We have ten miles to go—good Irish miles," said the father. "I don't know that I ever remember a fox from Poulnaroe taking that line before."

"He wasn't a Poulnaroe fox," said Peter.

"I don't know that," said Jack; and then they debated that question hotly.

Our horses were very tired, and it was late before we reached Mr. O'Conor's house. That getting home from hunting with a thoroughly weary animal, who has no longer sympathy or example to carry him on, is very tedious work. In the present instance I had company with me; but when a man is alone, when his horse toes at every ten steps, when the night is dark and the rain pouring, and there are yet eight miles of road to be conquered—at such times a man is almost apt to swear that he will give up hunting.

At last we were in the Castle Conor stableyard—for we had approached the house by some back way; and as we entered the house by a door leading through a wilderness of back passages, Mr. O'Conor said out loud, "Now, boys, remember I sit down to dinner in twenty minutes." And then turning expressly to me, he laid his hand kindly upon my shoulder and said, "I hope you will make yourself quite at home at Castle Conor—and whatever you do, don't keep us waiting for dinner. You can dress in twenty minutes, I suppose?"

"In ten!" said I, glibly.

"That's well. Jack and Peter will show you your room," and so he turned away and left us.

My two young friends made their way into the great hall, and thence into the drawing-room, and I followed them. We were all dressed in pink, and had waded deep through bog and mud. I did not exactly know whither I was being led in this guise, but I soon found myself in the presence of two young ladies, and of a girl about thirteen years of age.

"My sisters," said Jack, introducing me very laconically; "Miss O'Conor, Miss Kate O'Conor, Miss Tizzy O'Conor."

"My name is not Tizzy," said the younger; "it's Eliza. How do you do, sir? I hope you had a fine hunt! Was papa well up, Jack?"

Jack did not condescend to answer this question, but asked one of the elder girls whether anything had come, and whether a room had been made ready for me.

"Oh, yes!" said Miss O'Conor; "they came, I know, for I saw them brought into the house; and I hope Mr. Green will find everything comfortable." As she said this I thought I saw a slight smile steal across her remarkably pretty mouth.

They were both exceedingly pretty girls. Fanny, the elder, wore long glossy curls—for I write, oh, reader, of bygone days, as long ago as that, when ladies wore curls if it pleased them so to do, and gentleman danced in pumps, with black handkerchiefs round their necks—yes, long black, or nearly black silken curls; and then she had such eyes—I never knew whether they were most wicked or most bright; and her face was all dimples, and each dimple was laden with laughter and laden with love. Kate was probably the prettier girl of the two, but on the whole not so attractive. She was fairer than her sister, and wore her hair in braids; and was also somewhat more demure in her manner.

In spite of the special injunctions of Mr. O'Conor senior, it was impossible not to loiter for five minutes over the drawing-room fire talking to these houris—more especially as I seemed to know them intimately by intuition before half of the five minutes was over. They were so easy, so pretty, so graceful, so kind, they seemed to take it so much as a matter of course that I should stand there talking in my red coat and muddy boots.

"Well; do go and dress yourselves," at last said Fanny, pretending to speak to her brothers but looking more especially at me. "You know how mad papa will be. And remember, Mr. Green, we expect great things from your dancing to-night. Your coming just at this time is such a Godsend." And again that *soupçon* of a smile passed over her face.

I hurried up to my room, Peter and Jack coming with me to the door. "Is everything right?" said Peter, looking among the towels and water-jugs. "They've given you a decent fire for a wonder," said Jack, stirring up the red hot turf which blazed in the grate. "All right as a trivet," said I. "And look alive like a good fellow," said Jack. We had scowled at each other in the morning as very young men do when they are strangers; and now, after a few hours, we were intimate friends.

I immediately turned to my work, and was gratified to find that all my things were laid out ready for dressing; my portmanteau had of course come open, as my keys were in my pocket, and therefore some of the excellent servants of the house had been able to save me all the trouble of unpacking. There was my shirt hanging before the fire; my black clothes were spread upon the bed, my socks and collar and handkerchief beside them; my brushes were on the toilet table, and everything prepared exactly as though my own man had been there. How nice!

I immediately went to work at getting off my spurs and boots, and then proceeded to loosen the buttons at my knees. In doing this I sat down in the arm-chair which had been drawn up for me, opposite the fire. But what was the object on which my eyes then fell—the objects I should rather say!

Immediately in front of my chair was placed, just ready for my feet, an enormous pair of shooting-boots—half-boots, made to lace up around the ankles, with thick double leather soles, and each bearing half a stone of iron in the shape of nails and heel-pieces. I had superintended the making of these shoes in Burlington Arcade with the greatest diligence. I was never a good shot; and, like some other sportsmen, intended to make up for my deficiency in performance by the excellence of my shooting apparel. "Those nails are not large enough," I had said; "nor nearly large enough." But when the boots came home they struck even me as being too heavy, too metalsome. "He, he, he," laughed the boot boy as he turned them up for me to look at. It may therefore be imagined of what nature were the articles which were thus set out for the evening's dancing.

And then the way in which they were placed! When I saw this the conviction flew across my mind like a flash of lightning that the preparation had been made under other eyes than those of the servant. The heavy big boots were placed so prettily before the chair, and the strings of each were made to dangle down at the sides, as though just ready for tying! They seemed to say, the boots did, "Now, make haste. We at any rate are ready—you cannot say that you were kept waiting for us." No mere servant's hand had ever enabled a pair of boots to laugh at one so completely.

But what was I to do? I rushed at the small portmanteau, thinking that my pumps also might be there. The woman surely could not have been such a fool as to send me those tons of iron for my evening wear! But, alas, alas! no pumps were there. There was nothing else in the way of covering for my feet; not even a pair of slippers.

And now what was I to do? The absolute magnitude of my misfortune only loomed upon me by degrees. The twenty minutes allowed by that stern old paterfamilias were already gone and I had done nothing towards dressing. And indeed it was impossible that I should do anything that would be of avail. I could not go down to dinner in my stocking feet, nor could I put on my black dress trousers over a paid of mud-painted top-boots. As for those iron-soled horrors—and then I gave one of them a kick with the side of my bare foot which sent it half-way under the bed.

But what was I to do? I began washing myself and brushing my hair with this horrid weight upon my mind. My first plan was to go to bed, and send down word that I had been taken suddenly ill in the stomach; then to rise early in the morning and get away unobserved. But by such a course of action I should lose all chance of any further acquaintance with those pretty girls! That they were already aware of the extent of my predicament, and were now enjoying it—of that I was quite sure.

What if I boldly put on the shooting-boots, and clattered down to dinner in them? What if I took the bull by the horns, and made, myself, the most of the joke? This might be very well for the dinner, but it would be a bad joke for me when the hour for dancing came. And, alas! I felt that I lacked the courage. It is not every man that can walk down to dinner, in a strange house full of ladies, wearing such boots as those I have described.

Should I not attempt to borrow a pair? This, all the world will say, should have been my first idea. But I have not yet mentioned that I am myself a large-boned man, and that my feet are especially well developed. I had never for a moment entertained a hope that I should find anyone in that house whose boot I could wear. But at last I rang the bell. I would send for Jack, and if everything failed, I would communicate my grief to him.

I had to ring twice before anybody came. The servants, I well knew, were putting the dinner on the table. At last a man entered the room, dressed in rather shabby black, whom I afterwards learned to be the butler.

"What is your name, my friend?" said I, determined to make an ally of the man.

"My name? Why, Larry sure, yer honer. And the masther is out of his sinses in a hurry, becase yer honer don't come down."

"Is he though? Well, now, Larry; tell me this; which of all the gentlemen in the house has got the largest foot?"

"Is it the largest foot, yer honer?" said Larry, altogether surprised by my question.

"Yes; the largest foot," and then I proceeded to explain to him my misfortune. He took up first my top-boot, and then the shooting-boot—in looking at which he gazed with wonder at the nails—and then he glanced at my feet, measuring them with his eye; and after this he pronounced his opinion.

"Yer honer couldn't wear a morsel of leather belonging to ere a one of 'em, young or ould. There niver was a foot like that yet among the O'Conors."

"But are there no strangers staying here?"

"There's three or four on 'em come in to dinner; but they'll be wanting their own boots I'm thinking. And there's young Misther Dillon; he's come to stay. But Lord love you——" and he again looked at the enormous extent which lay between the heel and the toe of the shooting apparatus which he still held in his hand. "I niver see such a foot as that in the whole barony," he said, "barring my own."

Now Larry was a large man, much larger altogether than myself, and as he said this I looked down involuntarily at his feet; or rather at his foot, for as he stood I could only see one. And then a sudden hope filled my heart. On that foot there glittered a shoe—not indeed such as were my own which were now resting ingloriously at Ballyglass while they were so sorely needed at Castle Conor; but one which I could wear before ladies, without shame—and in my present frame of mind with infinite contentment.

"Let me look at that one of your own," said I to the man, as though it were merely a subject for experimental inquiry. Larry, accustomed to obedience, took off the shoe, and handed it to me. My own foot was immediately in it, and I found that it fitted me like a glove.

"And now the other," said I—not smiling, for a smile would have put him on his guard; but somewhat sternly, so that that habit of obedience should not desert him at this perilous moment. And then I stretched out my hand.

"But yer honer can't keep 'em you know," said he. "I haven't the ghost of another shoe to my feet." But I only looked more sternly than before, and still held out my hand. Custom prevailed. Larry stooped down slowly, looking at me the while, and pulling off the other slipper handed it to me with much hesitation. Alas; as I put it to my foot I found that it was old, and worn, and irredeemably down at heel—that it was in fact no counterpart at all to that other one which was to do duty as its fellow. But nevertheless I put my foot into it, and felt that a descent to the drawing-room was now possible.

"But yer honer will give 'em back to a poor man?" said Larry, almost crying. "The masther's mad this minute becase the dinner's not up. Glory to God, only listhen to that!" And as he spoke a tremendous peal rang out from some bell downstairs that had evidently been shaken by an angry hand.

"Larry," said I—and I endeavoured to assume a look of very grave importance as I spoke—"I look to you to assist me in this matter."

"Och—wirra sthrue then, and will you let me go? just listhen to that," and another angry peal rang out, loud and repeated.

"If you do as I ask you," I continued, "you shall be well rewarded. Look here; look at these boots," and I held up the shooting-shoes new from Burlington Arcade. "They cost thirty shillings—thirty shillings! and I will give them to you for the loan of this pair of slippers."

"They'd be no use at all to me, yer honer; not the laist use in life."

"You could do with them very well for to-night, and then you could sell them. And here are ten shillings besides," and I held out half a sovereign which the poor fellow took into his hand.

I waited no further parley but immediately walked out of the room. With one foot I was sufficiently pleased. As regarded that I felt that I had overcome my difficulty. But the other was not so satisfactory. Whenever I attempted to lift it from the ground the horrid slipper would fall off, or only just hang by the toe. As for dancing, that would be out of the question.

"Och, murther, murther," sang out Larry, as he heard me going downstairs. "What will I do at all? Tare and 'ounds; there, he's at it agin, as mad as blazes." This last exclamation had reference to another peal which was evidently the work of the master's hand.

I confess I was not quite comfortable as I walked downstairs. In the first place I was nearly half an hour late, and I knew from the vigour of the peals that had sounded that my slowness had already been made the subject of strong remarks. And then my left shoe went flop, flop, on every alternate step of the stairs. By no exertion of my foot in the drawing up of my toe could I induce it to remain permanently fixed upon my foot. But over and above and worse than all this was the conviction strong upon my mind that I should become a subject of merriment to the girls as soon as I entered the room. They would understand the cause of my distress, and probably at this moment were expecting to hear me clatter through the stone hall with those odious metal boots.

However, I hurried down and entered the drawing-room, determined to keep my position near the door, so that I might have as little as possible to do on entering and as little as possible in going out. But I had other difficulties in store for me. I had not as yet been introduced to Mrs. O'Conor; nor to Miss O'Conor, the squire's unmarried sister.

"Upon my word I thought you were never coming," said Mr. O'Conor as soon as he saw me. "It is just one hour since we entered the house. Jack, I wish you would find out what has come to that fellow Larry," and again he rang the bell. He was too angry, or it might be too impatient, to go through the ceremony of introducing me to anybody.

I saw that the two girls looked at me very sharply, but I stood at the back of an arm-chair so that no one could see my feet. But that little imp Tizzy walked round deliberately, looked at my heels, and then walked back again. It was clear that she was in the secret.

There were eight or ten people in the room, but I was too much fluttered to notice well who they were.

"Mamma," said Miss O'Conor, "let me introduce Mr. Green to you."

It luckily happened that Mrs. O'Conor was on the same side of the fire as myself, and I was able to take the hand which she offered me without coming round into the middle of the circle. Mrs. O'Conor was a little woman, apparently not of much importance in the world, but, if one might judge from first appearance, very good-natured.

"And my aunt Die, Mr. Green," said Kate, pointing to a very straight-backed, grim-looking lady, who occupied a corner of a sofa, on the opposite side of the hearth. I knew that politeness required that I should walk across the room and make acquaintance with her. But under the existing circumstances how was I to obey the dictates of my politeness? I was determined therefore to stand my ground, and merely bowed across the room at Miss O'Conor. In so doing I made an enemy who never deserted me during the whole of my intercourse with the family. But for her, who knows who might have been sitting opposite to me as I now write?

"Upon my word, Mr. Green, the ladies will expect much from an Adonis who takes so long over his toilet," said Tom O'Conor in that cruel tone of banter which he knew so well how to use.

"You forget, father, that men in London can't jump in and out of their clothes as quick as we wild Irishmen," said Jack.

"Mr. Green knows that we expect a great deal from him this evening. I hope you polk well, Mr. Green," said Kate.

I muttered something about never dancing, but I knew that that which I said was inaudible.

"I don't think Mr. Green will dance," said Tizzy; "at least not much." The impudence of that child was, I think, unparaleled by any that I have ever witnessed.

"But in the name of all that's holy, why don't we have dinner?" And Mr. O'Conor thundered at the door. "Larry, Larry, Larry!" he screamed.

"Yes, yer honer, it'll be all right in two seconds," answered Larry, from some bottomless abyss. "Tare an' ages; what'll I do at all," I heard him continuing, as he made his way into the hall. Oh, what a clatter he made upon the pavement—for it was all stone! And how the drops of perspiration stood upon my brow as I listened to him!

And then there was a pause, for the man had gone into the dining-room. I could see now that Mr. O'Conor was becoming very angry, and Jack the eldest son—oh, how often he and I have laughed over all this since—left the drawing-room for the second time. Immediately afterwards Larry's footsteps were again heard, hurrying across the hall, and then there was a great slither, and an exclamation, and the noise of a fall—and I could plainly hear poor Larry's head strike against the stone floor.

"Ochone, ochone!" he cried at the top of his voice, "I'm murthered with 'em now intirely; and d—— 'em for boots—St. Peter be good to me."

There was a general rush into the hall, and I was carried with the stream. The poor fellow, who had broken his head, would be sure to tell how I had robbed him of his shoes. The coachman was already helping him up, and Peter good-naturedly lent a hand.

"What on earth is the matter?" said Mr. O'Conor.

"He must be tipsy," whispered Miss O'Conor, the maiden sister.

"I ain't tipsy at all thin," said Larry, getting up and rubbing the back of his head, and sundry other parts of his body. "Tipsy indeed!" And then he added when he was quite upright, "The dinner is sarved—at last."

And he bore it all without telling! "I'll give that fellow a guinea to-morrow morning," said I to myself, "if it's the last that I have in the world."

I shall never forget the countenance of the Miss O'Conors as Larry scrambled up, cursing the unfortunate boots. "What on earth has he got on?" said Mr. O'Conor.

"Sorrow take 'em for shoes," ejaculated Larry. But his spirit was good and he said not a word to betray me. We all then went in to dinner how we best could. It was useless for us to go back into the drawing-room, that each might seek his own partner. Mr. O'Conor, "the masther," not caring much for the girls who were around him, and being already half beside himself with the confusion and delay, led the way by himself. I as a stranger should have given my arm to Mrs. O'Conor; but as it was I took her eldest daughter instead, and contrived to shuffle along into the dining-room without exciting much attention, and when there I found myself happily placed between Kate and Fanny.

"I never knew anything so awkward," said Fanny; "I declare I can't conceive what has come to our old servant Larry. He's generally the most precise person in the world, and now he is nearly an hour late—and then he tumbles down in the hall."

"I am afraid I am responsible for the delay," said I.

"But not for the tumble, I suppose," said Kate from the other side. I felt that I blushed up to the eyes, but I did not dare to enter into explanations.

"Tom," said Tizzy, addressing her father across the table, "I hope you had a good run to-day." It did seem odd to me that a young lady should call her father Tom, but such was the fact.

"Well; pretty well," said Mr. O'Conor.

"And I hope you were up with the hounds."

"You may ask Mr. Green that. He at any rate was with them, and therefore he can tell you."

"Oh, he wasn't before you, I know. No Englishman could get before you—I am quite sure of that."

"Don't you be impertinent, miss," said Kate. "You can easily see, Mr. Green, that papa spoils my sister Eliza."

"Do you hunt in top-boots, Mr. Green?" said Tizzy.

To this I made no answer. She would have drawn me into a conversation about my feet in half a minute, and the slightest allusion to the subject threw me into a fit of perspiration.

"Are you fond of hunting, Miss O'Conor?" asked I, blindly hurrying into any other subject of conversation.

Miss O'Conor owned that she was fond of hunting—just a little; only papa would not allow it. When the hounds met anywhere within reach of Castle Conor, she and Kate would ride out to look at them; and if papa was not there that day—an omission of rare occurrence—they would ride a few fields with the hounds.

"But he lets Tizzy keep with them the whole day," said she, whispering.

"And has Tizzy a pony of her own?"

"Oh, yes, Tizzy has everything. She's papa's pet, you know."

"And whose pet are you?" I asked.

"Oh—I am nobody's pet, unless sometimes Jack makes a pet of me when he's in a good humour. Do you make pets of your sisters, Mr. Green?"

"I have none. But if I had I should not make pets of them."

"Not of your own sisters?"

"No. As for myself, I'd sooner make a pet of my friend's sister, a great deal."

"How very unnatural," said Miss O'Conor, with the prettiest look of surprise imaginable.

"Not at all unnatural, I think," said I, looking tenderly and lovingly into her face. Where does one find girls so pretty, so easy, so sweet, so talkative as the Irish girls? And then with all their talking and all their ease who ever hears of their misbehaving? They certainly love flirting as they also love dancing. But they flirt without mischief and without malice.

I had now quite forgotten my misfortune, and was beginning to think how well I should like to have Fanny O'Conor for my wife. In this frame of mind I was bending over towards her as a servant took away a plate from the other side, when a sepulchral note sounded in my ear. It was like the *memento mori* of the old Roman—as though some one pointed in the midst of my bliss to the sword hung over my head by a thread. It was the voice of Larry, whispering in his agony just above my head:

"They's disthroying my poor feet intirely, intirely, so they is! I can't bear it much longer, yer honer." I had committed murder like Macbeth; and now my Banquo had come to disturb me at my feast.

"What is it he says to you?" asked Fanny.

"Oh, nothing," I answered, once more in my misery.

"There seems to be some point of confidence between you and our Larry," she remarked.

"Oh, no," said I, quite confused; "not at all."

"You need not be ashamed of it. Half the gentlemen in the county have their confidences with Larry—and some of the ladies too, I can tell you. He was born in this house, and never lived anywhere else; and I am sure he has a larger circle of acquaintances than anyone else in it."

I could not recover my self-possession for the next ten minutes. Whenever Larry was on our side of the table I was afraid he was coming to me with another agonised whisper. When he was opposite, I could not but watch him as he hobbled in his misery. It was evident that the boots were too tight for him, and had they been made throughout of iron they could not have been less capable of yielding to the feet. I pitied him from the bottom of my heart. And I pitied myself also, wishing that I was well in bed upstairs with some feigned malady, so that Larry might have had his own again.

And then for a moment I missed him from the room. He had doubtless gone to relieve his tortured feet in the servants' hall, and as he did so was cursing my cruelty. But what mattered it? Let him curse. If he would only stay away and do that, I would appease his wrath when we were alone together with pecuniary satisfaction.

But there was no such rest in store for me. "Larry, Larry," shouted Mr. O'Conor, "where on earth has the fellow gone to?" They were all cousins at the table except myself, and Mr. O'Conor was not therefore restrained by any feeling of ceremony. "There is something wrong with that fellow to-day; what is it, Jack?"

"Upon my word, sir, I don't know," said Jack.

"I think he must be tipsy," whispered Miss O'Conor, the maiden sister, who always sat at her brother's left hand. But a whisper though it was, it was audible all down the table.

"No, ma'am; it ain't dhrink at all," said the coachman. "It is his feet as does it."

"His feet!" shouted Tom O'Conor.

"Yes; I know it's his feet," said that horrid Tizzy. "He's got on great thick nailed shoes. It was that that made him tumble down in the hall."

I glanced at each side of me, and could see that there was a certain consciousness expressed in the face of each of my two neighbours—on Kate's mouth there was decidedly a smile, or rather, perhaps, the slightest possible inclination that way; whereas on Fanny's part I thought I saw something like a rising sorrow at my distress. So at least I flattered myself.

"Send him back into the room immediately," said Tom, who looked at me as though he had some consciousness that I had introduced all this confusion into his household. What should I do? Would it not be best for me to make a clean breast of it before them all? But alas! I lacked the courage.

The coachman went out, and we were left for five minutes without any servant, and Mr. O'Conor the while became more and more savage. I attempted to say a word to Fanny, but failed. My voice stuck in my throat.

"I don't think he has got any others," said Tizzy—"at least none others left."

On the whole I am glad I did not marry into the family, as I could not have endured that girl to stay in my house as a sister-in-law.

"Where the d—— has that other fellow gone to?" said Tom. "Jack, do go out and see what is the matter. If anybody is drunk send for me."

"Oh, there is nobody drunk." said Tizzy.

Jack went out, and the coachman returned; but what was done and said I hardly remember. The whole room seemed to swim round and round, and as far as I can recollect the company sat mute, neither eating nor drinking. Presently Jack returned.

"It's all right," said he. I always liked Jack. At the present moment he just looked towards me and laughed slightly.

"All right?" said Tom. "But is the fellow coming?"

"We can do with Richard, I suppose," said Jack.

"No—I can't do with Richard," said the father. "And I will know what it all means. Where is that fellow Larry?"

Larry had been standing just outside the door, and now he entered gently as a mouse. No sound came from his footfall, nor was there in his face that look of pain which it had worn for the last fifteen minutes. But he was not the less abashed, frightened, and unhappy.

"What is all this about, Larry?" said his master, turning to him. "I insist upon knowing."

"Och thin, Mr. Green, yer honer, I wouldn't be afther telling agin yer honer; indeed I wouldn't thin, av the masther would only let me hould my tongue." And he looked across at me, deprecating my anger.

"Mr. Green!" said Mr. O'Conor.

"Yes, yer honer. It's all along of his honer's thick shoes"; and Larry, stepping backwards towards the door, lifted them up from some corner, and coming well forward, exposed them with the soles uppermost to the whole table.

"And that's not all, yer honer; but they've squoze the very toes of me into a jelly."

There was now a loud laugh, in which Jack and Peter and Fanny and Kate and Tizzy all joined; as too did Mr. O'Conor—and I also myself after a while.

"Whose boots are they?" demanded Miss O'Conor senior, with her severest tone and grimmest accent.

"'Deed then and the divil may have them for me, miss," answered Larry. "They war Mr. Green's, but the likes of him won't wear them agin afther the likes of me—barring he wanted them very particular," added he, remembering his own pumps.

I began muttering something, feeling that the time had come when I must tell the tale. But Jack, with great good nature, took up the story, and told it so well that I hardly suffered in the telling.

"And that's it," said Tom O'Conor, laughing till I thought he would have fallen from his chair. "So you've got Larry's shoes on——"

"And very well he fills them," said Jack.

"And it's his honer that's welcome to 'em," said Larry, grinning from ear to ear now that he saw that "the masther" was once more in a good humour.

"I hope they'll be nice shoes for dancing," said Kate.

"Only there's one down at the heel I know," said Tizzy.

"The servant's shoes!" This was an exclamation made by the maiden lady, and intended apparently only for her brother's ear. But it was clearly audible by all the party.

"Better that than no dinner," said Peter.

"But what are you to do about the dancing?" said Fanny, with an air of dismay on her face which flattered me with an idea that she did care whether I danced or no.

In the meantime Larry, now as happy as an emperor, was tripping round the room without any shoes to encumber him as he withdrew the plates from the table.

"And it's his honer that's welcome to 'em," said he again, as he pulled off the tablecloth with a flourish. "And why wouldn't he, and he able to folly the hounds betther nor any Englishman that iver war in these parts before—anyways so Mick says!"

Now Mick was the huntsman, and this little tale of eulogy from Larry went far towards easing my grief. I had ridden well to the hounds that day, and I knew it.

There was nothing more said about the shoes, and I was soon again at my ease, although Miss O'Conor did say something about the impropriety of Larry walking about in his stocking feet. The ladies, however, soon withdrew—to my sorrow, for I was getting on swimmingly with Fanny, and then we gentlemen gathered round the fire and filled our glasses.

In about ten minutes a very light tap was heard, the door was opened to the extent of three inches, and a female voice which I readily recognised called to Jack.

Jack went out, and in a second or two put his head back into the room and called to me: "Green," he said, "just step here a moment, there's a good fellow." I went out, and there I found Fanny standing with her brother.

"Here are the girls at their wits' ends," said he, "about your dancing. So Fanny has put a boy upon one of the horses, and proposes that you should send another line to Mrs. Meehan at Ballyglass. It's only ten miles, and he'll be back in two hours."

I need hardly say that I acted in conformity with this advice. I went into Mr. O'Conor's book-room with Jack and his sister, and there scribbled a note. It was delightful to feel how intimate I was with them, and how anxious they were to make me happy.

"And we won't begin till they come," said Fanny.

"Oh, Miss O'Conor, pray don't wait," said I.

"Oh, but we will," she answered. "You have your wine to drink, and then there's the tea; and then we'll have a song or two. I'll spin it out; see if I don't." And so we went to the front door where the boy was already on his horse—her own nag as I afterwards found.

"And Patsey," said she "ride for your life; and Patsey, whatever you do, don't come back without Mr. Green's pumps—his dancing shoes, you know."

And in about two hours the pumps did arrive: and I don't think I ever spent a pleasanter evening or got more satisfaction out of a pair of shoes. They had not been two minutes on my feet before Larry was carrying a tray of negus across the room in those which I had worn at dinner.

"The Dillon girls are going to stay here," said Fanny as I wished her good night at two o'clock. "And we'll have dancing every evening as long as you remain."

"But I shall leave to-morrow," said I.

"Indeed you won't. Papa will take care of that."

And so he did. "You had better go over to Ballyglass yourself tomorrow," said he, "and collect your own things. There's no knowing else what you may have to borrow off Larry."

I stayed there three weeks, and in the middle of the third I thought that everything would be arranged between me and Fanny. But the aunt interfered; and in about a twelvemonth after my adventures she consented to make a more fortunate man happy for his life.

GEORGE ELIOT

(1819–1880)

"GEORGE ELIOT" (the pseudonym of Mary Ann, or Marian Evans) was brought up in a strict, almost narrow evangelical atmosphere. She reflected something of her early life in much of her writing. Although acquiring more liberal views as time progressed, it is for her pictures of that early life, as mirrored in her novels, that she will chiefly be remembered. The lifelong union she formed with George Henry Lewes in 1854 followed her resignation of the post of assistant editor of the *Westminster Review*. *Amos Barton*, her first work of any moment, appeared serially in *Blackwood's Magazine* in 1857. Amongst her best-known works must be counted *Scenes from Clerical Life* (1858), *Adam Bede* (1859), *The Mill on the Floss* (1860), and *Silas Marner* (1861). A visit to Florence gave her the materials for *Romola*, published serially in the *Cornhill* (1862–3). After the death of Lewes in 1878, she married a New York banker, Mr. J. W. Cross. Her work, although didactic to the last degree, must always rank high as the faithful reflection of a certain stratum of English life.

THE LIFTED VEIL

CHAPTER I

THE time of my end approaches. I have lately been subject to attacks of *angina pectoris;* and in the ordinary course of things, my physician tells me, I may fairly hope that my life will not be protracted many months. Unless, then, I am cursed with an exceptional physical constitution, as I am cursed with an exceptional mental character, I shall not much longer groan under the wearisome burthen of this earthly existence. If it were to be otherwise—if I were to live on to the age most men desire and provide for—I should for once have known whether the miseries of delusive expectation can outweigh the miseries of true prevision. For I foresee when I shall die, and everything that will happen in my last moments.

Just a month from this day, on September 20, 1850, I shall be sitting in this chair, in this study, at ten o'clock at night, longing to die, weary of incessant insight and foresight, without delusions and without hope. Just as I am watching a tongue of blue flame rising in the fire, and my lamp is burning low, the horrible contraction will begin at my chest. I shall only have time to reach the bell, and pull it violently, before the sense of suffocation will come. No one will answer my bell. I know why. My two servants are lovers, and will have quarrelled. My housekeeper will have rushed out of the house in a fury, two hours before, hoping that Perry will believe she has gone to drown herself. Perry is alarmed at last, and is gone out after her. The little scullery-maid is asleep on a bench: she never answers the bell; it does not wake her. The sense of suffocation increases: my lamp goes out with a horrible stench: I make a great effort, and snatch at the bell again. I long for life, and there is no help. I thirsted for the unknown: the thirst is gone. O God, let me stay with the known, and be weary of it: I am content. Agony of pain and suffocation—and all the while the earth, the fields, the pebbly brook at the bottom of the rookery, the fresh scent after the rain, the light of the morning through my chamber-window, the warmth of the hearth after the frosty air—will darkness close over them for ever?

Darkness—darkness—no pain—nothing but darkness: but I am passing on and on through the darkness: my thought stays in the darkness, but always with a sense of moving onward. . . .

Before that time comes, I wish to use my last hours of ease and strength in telling the strange story of my experience. I have never fully unbosomed myself to any human being; I have never been encouraged to trust much in the sympathy of my fellow-men. But we have all a chance of meeting with some pity, some tenderness, some charity, when we are dead: it is the living only who cannot be forgiven—the living only from whom men's indulgence and reverence are held off, like the rain by the hard east wind. While the heart beats, bruise it—it is your only opportunity; while the eye can still turn towards you with moist, timid entreaty, freeze it with an icy unanswering gaze; while the ear, that delicate messenger to the inmost sanctuary of the soul, can still take in the tones of kindness, put it off with hard civility, or sneering compliment, or envious affectation of indifference; while the creative brain can still throb with the sense of injustice, with the yearning for brotherly recognition—make haste—oppress it with your ill-considered judgments, your trivial comparisons, your careless misrepresentations. The heart will by and by be still—"ubi saeva indignatio ulterius cor lacerare nequit" *; the eye will cease to entreat; the ear will be deaf; the brain will have ceased from all wants as well as from all work. Then your charitable speeches may find vent; then you may remember and pity the toil and the struggle and the failure; then you may give due honour to the work achieved; then you may find extenuation for errors, and may consent to bury them.

That is a trivial schoolboy text; why do I dwell on it? It has little reference to me, for I shall leave no works behind me for men to honour. I have no near relatives who will make up, by weeping over

* Inscription on Swift's tombstone.

my grave, for the wounds they inflicted on me when I was among them. It is only the story of my life that will perhaps win a little more sympathy from strangers when I am dead, than I ever believed it would obtain from my friends while I was living.

My childhood perhaps seems happier to me than it really was, by contrast with all the after-years. For then the curtain of the future was as impenetrable to me as to other children: I had all their delight in the present hour, their sweet indefinite hopes for the morrow; and I had a tender mother: even now, after the dreary lapse of long years, a slight trace of sensation accompanies the remembrance of her caress as she held me on her knee—her arms round my little body, her cheek pressed on mine. I had a complaint of the eyes that made me blind for a little while, and she kept me on her knee from morning till night. That unequalled love soon vanished out of my life, and even to my childish consciousness it was as if that life had become more chill. I rode my little white pony with the groom by my side as before, but there were no loving eyes looking at me as I mounted, no glad arms opened to me when I came back. Perhaps I missed my mother's love more than most children of seven or eight would have done, to whom the other pleasures of life remained as before; for I was certainly a very sensitive child. I remember still the mingled trepidation and delicious excitement with which I was affected by the tramping of the horses on the pavement in the echoing stables, by the loud resonance of the groom's voices, by the booming bark of the dogs as my father's carriage thundered under the archway of the courtyard, by the din of the gong as it gave notice of luncheon and dinner. The measured tramp of soldiery which I sometimes heard—for my father's house lay near a county town where there were large barracks—made me sob and tremble; and yet when they were gone past, I longed for them to come back again.

I fancy my father thought me an odd child, and had little fondness for me; though he was very careful in fulfilling what he regarded as a parent's duties. But he was already past the middle of life, and I was not his only son. My mother had been his second wife, and he was five-and-forty when he married her. He was a firm, unbending, intensely orderly man, in root and stem a banker, but with a flourishing graft of the active landholder, aspiring to county influence: one of those people who are always like themselves from day to day, who are uninfluenced by the weather, and neither know melancholy nor high spirits. I held him in great awe, and appeared more timid and sensitive in his presence than at other times; a circumstance which, perhaps, helped to confirm him in the intention to educate me on a different plan from the prescriptive one with which he had complied in the case of my elder brother, already a tall youth at Eton. My brother was to be his representative and successor; he must go to Eton and Oxford, for the sake of making connections, of course: my father was not a man to underrate the bearing of Latin satirists or Greek dramatists on the attainment of an aristocratic position. But, intrinsically, he had slight esteem for "those dead but sceptred spirits"; having qualified himself for forming an independent opinion by reading Potter's *Æschylus*, and dipping into Francis's *Horace*. To this negative view he added a positive one, derived from a recent connection with mining speculations; namely, that a scientific education was the really useful training for a younger son. Moreover, it was clear that a shy, sensitive boy like me was not fit to encounter the rough experience of a public school. Mr. Letherall had said so very decidedly. Mr. Letherall was a large man in spectacles, who one day took my small head between his large hands, and pressed it here and there in an exploratory, suspicious manner—then placed each of his great thumbs on my temples, and pushed me a little way from him, and stared at me with glittering spectacles. The contemplation appeared to displease him, for he frowned sternly, and said to my father, drawing his thumbs across my eyebrows:

"The deficiency is there, sir—there; and here," he added, touching the upper sides of my head, "here is the excess. That must be brought out, sir, and this must be laid to sleep."

I was in a state of tremor, partly at the vague idea that I was the object of reprobation, partly in the agitation of my first hatred—hatred of this big, spectacled man, who pulled my head about as if he wanted to buy and cheapen it.

I am not aware how much Mr. Letherall had to do with the system afterwards adopted towards me, but it was presently clear that private tutors, natural history, science, and the modern languages, were the appliances by which the defects of my organization were to be remedied. I was very stupid about machines, so I was to be greatly occupied with them; I had no memory for classification, so it was particularly necessary that I should study systematic zoology and botany; I was hungry for human deeds and humane motions, so I was to be plentifully crammed with the mechanical powers, the elementary bodies, and the phenomena of electricity and magnetism. A better-constituted boy would certainly have profited under my intelligent tutors, with their scientific apparatus; and would, doubtless, have found the phenomena of electricity and magnetism as fascinating as I was, every Thursday, assured they were. As it was, I could have paired off, for ignorance of whatever was taught me, with the worst Latin scholar that was ever turned out of a classical academy. I read Plutarch, and Shakespeare, and Don Quixote by the sly, and supplied myself in that way with wandering thoughts, while my tutor was assuring me that "an improved man, as distinguished from an ignorant one, was a man who knew the reason why water ran downhill." I had no desire to be this improved man; I was glad of the running water; I could watch it and listen to it gurgling among the pebbles, and bathing the bright green water-plants, by the hour together. I did not want to know *why* it ran; I had perfect confidence that there were good reasons for what was so very beautiful.

There is no need to dwell on this part of my life. I have said enough to indicate that my nature was of the sensitive, unpractical order, and that it grew up in an uncongenial medium, which could never foster it into happy, healthy development. When I was sixteen I was sent to Geneva to complete my course of education; and the change was a very happy one to me, for the first sight of the Alps, with the setting sun on them, as we descended the Jura, seemed to me like an entrance into heaven; and the three years of my life there were spent in a perpetual sense of exaltation, as if from a draught of delicious wine, at the presence of nature in all her awful loveliness. You will think, perhaps, that I must have been a poet, from this early sensibility to nature. But my lot was not so happy as that. A poet pours forth his song and *believes* in the listening ear and answering soul, to which his song will be floated sooner or later. But the poet's sensibility without his voice—the poet's sensibility that finds no vent but in silent tears on the sunny bank, when the noonday light sparkles on the water, or in an inward shudder at the sound of harsh human tones, the sight of a cold human eye—this dumb passion brings with it a fatal solitude of soul in the society of one's fellow-men. My least solitary moments were those in which I pushed off in my boat, at evening, towards the centre of the lake; it seemed to me that the sky, and the glowing mountain tops, and the wide blue water, surrounded me with a cherishing love such as no human face had shed on me since my mother's love had vanished out of my life. I used to do as Jean Jacques did—lie down in my boat and let it glide where it would, while I looked up at the departing glow leaving one mountain top after the other, as if the prophet's chariot of fire were passing over them on its way to the home of light. Then, when the white summits were all sad and corpse-like, I had to push homeward, for I was under careful surveillance, and was allowed no late wanderings. This disposition of mine was not favourable to the formation of intimate friendships among the numerous youths of my own age who are always to be found studying at Geneva. Yet I made *one* such friendship; and, singularly enough, it was with a youth whose intellectual tendencies were the very reverse of my own. I shall call him Charles Meunier; his real surname—an English one, for he was of English extraction—having since become celebrated. He was an orphan, who lived on a miserable pittance while he pursued the medical studies for which he had a special genius. Strange! that with my vague mind, susceptible and unobservant, hating inquiry and given up to contemplation, I should have been drawn towards a youth whose strongest passion was science. But the bond was not an intellectual one; it came from a source that can happily blend the stupid with the brilliant, the dreamy with the practical: it came from community of feeling. Charles was poor and ugly, derided by Genevese *gamins*, and not acceptable in drawing-rooms. I saw that he was isolated, as I was, though from a different cause, and, stimulated by a sympathetic resentment, I made timid advances towards him. It is enough to say that there sprang up as much comradeship between us as our different habits would allow; and in Charles's rare holidays we went up the Salève together, or took the boat to Vevay, while I listened dreamily to the monologues in which he unfolded his bold conceptions of future experiment and discovery. I mingled them confusedly in my thought with glimpses of blue water and delicate floating cloud, with the notes of birds and the distant glitter of the glacier. He knew quite well that my mind was half absent, yet he liked to talk to me in this way; for don't we talk of our hopes and our projects even to dogs and birds, when they love us? I have mentioned this one friendship because of its connection with a strange and terrible scene which I shall have to narrate in my subsequent life.

This happier life at Geneva was put an end to by a severe illness, which is partly a blank to me, partly a time of dimly-remembered suffering, with the presence of my father by my bed from time to time. Then came the languid monotony of convalescence, the days gradually breaking into variety and distinctness as my strength enabled me to take longer and longer drives. On one of these more vividly remembered days, my father said to me, as he sat beside my sofa:

"When you are quite well enough to travel, Latimer, I shall take you home with me. The journey will amuse you and do you good, for I shall go through the Tyrol and Austria, and you will see many new places. Our neighbours, the Filmores, are come; Alfred will join us at Basle, and we shall all go together to Vienna, and back by Prague" . . .

My father was called away before he had finished his sentence, and he left my mind resting on the word *Prague*, with a strange sense that a new and wondrous scene was breaking upon me: a city under the broad sunshine, that seemed to me as if it were the summer sunshine of a long-past century arrested in its course—unrefreshed for ages by dews of night, or the rushing rain-cloud; scorching the dusty, weary, time-eaten grandeur of a people doomed to live on in the stale repetition of memories, like deposed and superannuated kings in their regal gold-inwoven tatters. The city looked so thirsty that the broad river seemed to me a sheet of metal; and the blackened statues, as I passed under their blank gaze, along the unending bridge, with their ancient garments and their saintly crowns, seemed to me the real inhabitants and owners of this place, while the busy, trivial men and women, hurrying to and fro, were a swarm of ephemeral visitants infesting it for a day. It is such grim, stony beings as these, I thought, who are the fathers of ancient faded children, in those tanned time-fretted dwellings that crowd the steep before me; who pay their court in the worn and crumbling pomp of the palace which stretches its monotonous length on the height; who worship wearily in the stifling air of the churches, urged by no fear or hope, but compelled by their doom to be ever old and undying, to live on in the rigidity of habit, as they live on in perpetual midday, without the repose of night or the new birth of morning.

A stunning clang of metal suddenly thrilled through me, and I bebecame conscious of the objects in my room again: one of the fire-irons had fallen as Pierre opened the door to bring me my draught. My heart was palpitating violently, and I begged Pierre to leave my draught beside me; I would take it presently.

As soon as I was alone again, I began to ask myself whether I had been sleeping. Was this a dream—this wonderfully distinct vision—minute in its distinctness down to a patch of rainbow light on the pavement, transmitted through a coloured lamp in the shape of a star—of a strange city, quite unfamiliar to my imagination? I had seen no picture of Prague: it lay in my mind as a mere name, with vaguely-remembered historical associations—ill-defined memories of imperial grandeur and religious wars.

Nothing of this sort had ever occurred in my dreaming experience before, for I had often been humiliated because my dreams were only saved from being utterly disjointed and commonplace by the frequent terrors of nightmare. But I could not believe that I had been asleep, for I remembered distinctly the gradual breaking-in of the vision upon me, like the new images in a dissolving view, or the growing distinctness of the landscape as the sun lifts up the veil of the morning mist. And while I was conscious of this incipient vision, I was also conscious that Pierre came to tell my father Mr. Filmore was waiting for him, and that my father hurried out of the room. No, it was not a dream; was it—the thought was full of tremulous exultation—was it the poet's nature in me, hitherto only a troubled yearning sensibility, now manifesting itself suddenly as spontaneous creation? Surely it was in this way that Homer saw the plain of Troy, that Dante saw the abodes of the departed, that Milton saw the earthward flight of the Tempter. Was it that my illness had wrought some happy change in my organization—given a firmer tension to my nerves—carried off some dull obstruction? I had often read of such effects—in works of fiction at least. Nay; in genuine biographies I had read of the subtilising or exalting influence of some diseases on the mental powers. Did not Novalis feel his inspiration intensified under the progress of consumption?

When my mind had dwelt for some time on this blissful idea, it seemed to me that I might perhaps test it by an exertion of my will. The vision had begun when my father was speaking of our going to Prague. I did not for a moment believe it was really a representation of that city; I believed—I hoped it was a picture that my newly liberated genius had painted in fiery haste, with the colours snatched from lazy memory. Suppose I were to fix my mind on some other place—Venice, for example, which was far more familiar to my imagination than Prague: perhaps the same sort of result would follow. I concentrated my thoughts on Venice; I stimulated my imagination with poetic memories, and strove to feel myself present in Venice, as I had felt myself present in Prague. But in vain. I was only colouring the Canaletto engravings that hung in my old bedroom at home; the picture was a shifting one, my mind wandering uncertainly in search of more vivid images; I could see no accident of form or shadow without conscious labour after the necessary conditions. It was all prosaic effort, not rapt passivity, such as I had experienced half an hour before. I was discouraged; but I remembered that inspiration was fitful.

For several days I was in a state of excited expectation, watching for a recurrence of my new gift. I sent my thoughts ranging over my world of knowledge, in the hope that they would find some object which would send a reawakening vibration through my slumbering genius. But no; my world remained as dim as ever, and that flash of strange light refused to come again, though I watched for it with palpitating eagerness.

My father accompanied me every day in a drive, and a gradually lengthening walk as my powers of walking increased; and one evening he had agreed to come and fetch me at twelve the next day, that we might go together to select a musical box, and other purchases rigorously demanded of a rich Englishman visiting Geneva. He was one of the most punctual of men and bankers, and I was always nervously anxious to be quite ready for him at the appointed time. But, to my surprise, at a quarter past twelve he had not appeared. I felt all the impatience of a convalescent who has nothing particular to do, and who has just taken a tonic in the prospect of immediate exercise that would carry off the stimulus.

Unable to sit still and reserve my strength, I walked up and down the room, looking out on the current of the Rhone, just where it leaves the dark-blue lake; but thinking all the while of the possible causes that could detain my father.

Suddenly I was conscious that my father was in the room, but not alone: there were two persons with him. Strange! I had heard no footstep, I had not seen the door open; but I saw my father, and at his right hand our neighbour Mrs. Filmore, whom I remembered very well, though I had not seen her for five years. She was a commonplace middle-aged woman, in silk and cashmere; but the lady on the left of my father was not more than twenty, a tall, slim, willowy figure, with luxuriant blond hair, arranged in cunning braids and folds that looked almost too massive for the slight figure and the small-featured, thin-lipped face they crowned. But the face had not a girlish expression: the features were sharp, the pale grey eyes at once acute, restless, and sarcastic. They were fixed on me in half-smiling curiosity, and I felt a painful sensation as if a sharp wind were cutting me. The pale-green dress, and the green leaves that seemed to form a border about her pale blond hair, made me think of a Water-Nixie—for my mind was full of German lyrics, and this pale, fatal-eyed woman, with the green weeds, looked like a birth from some cold sedgy stream, the daughter of an aged river.

"Well, Latimer, you thought me long," my father said. . . .

But while the last word was in my ears, the whole group vanished, and there was nothing between me and the Chinese painted folding-screen that stood before the door. I was cold and trembling; I could only totter forward and throw myself on the sofa. This strange new power had manifested itself again. . . . But *was* it a power? Might it not rather be a disease—a sort of intermittent delirium, concentrating my energy of brain into moments of unhealthy activity, and leaving my saner hours all the more barren? I felt a dizzy sense of unreality in what my eye rested on; I grasped the bell convulsively, like one trying to free himself from nightmare, and rang it twice. Pierre came with a look of alarm in his face.

"Monsieur ne se trouve pas bien?" he said anxiously.

"I'm tired of waiting, Pierre," I said, as distinctly and emphatically as I could, like a man determined to be sober in spite of wine; "I'm afraid something has happened to my father—he's usually so punctual. Run to the Hôtel des Bergues and see if he is there."

Pierre left the room at once, with a soothing "Bien, monsieur"; and I felt the better for this scene of simple, waking prose. Seeking to calm myself still further, I went into my bedroom, adjoining the *salon*, and opened a case of eau-de-Cologne; took out a bottle; went through the process of taking out the cork very neatly, and then rubbed the reviving spirit over my hands and forehead, and under my nostrils, drawing a new delight from the scent because I had procured it by slow details of labour, and by no strange sudden madness. Already I had begun to taste something of the horror that belongs to the lot of a human being whose nature is not adjusted to simple human conditions.

Still enjoying the scent, I returned to the *salon*, but it was not unoccupied, as it had been before I left it. In front of the Chinese folding-screen there was my father, with Mrs. Filmore on his right hand, and on his left—the slim, blond-haired girl, with the keen face and the keen eyes fixed on me in half-smiling curiosity.

"Well, Latimer, you thought me long," my father said. . . .

I heard no more, felt no more, till I became conscious that I was lying with my head low on the sofa, Pierre, and my father by my side. As soon as I was thoroughly revived, my father left the room, and presently returned, saying:

"I've been to tell the ladies how you are, Latimer. They were waiting in the next room. We shall put off our shopping expedition to-day."

Presently he said, "That young lady is Bertha Grant, Mrs. Filmore's orphan niece. Filmore has adopted her, and she lives with them, so you will have her for a neighbour when we go home—perhaps for a near relation; for there is a tenderness between her and Alfred, I suspect, and I should be gratified by the match, since Filmore means to provide for her in every way as if she were his daughter. It had not occurred to me that you knew nothing about her living with the Filmores."

He made no further allusion to the fact of my having fainted at the moment of seeing her, and I would not for the world have told him the reason: I shrank from the idea of disclosing to anyone what might be regarded as a pitiable peculiarity, most of all from betraying it to my father, who would have suspected my sanity ever after.

I do not mean to dwell with particularity on the details of my experience. I have described these two cases at length, because they had definite, clearly traceable results in my after-lot.

Shortly after this last occurrence—I think the very next day—I began to be aware of a phase in my abnormal sensibility, to which, from the languid and slight nature of my intercourse with others since my illness, I had not been alive before. This was the obtrusion on my mind of the mental process going forward in first one person, and then another, with whom I happened to be in contact: the vagrant, frivolous ideas and emotions of some uninteresting acquaintance—Mrs. Filmore, for example—would force themselves on my consciousness like an importunate, ill-played musical instrument, or the loud activity of an imprisoned insect. But this unpleasant sensibility was fitful, and left me moments of rest, when the souls of my companions were once more shut out from me, and I felt a relief such as silence brings to wearied nerves. I might have believed this importunate insight to be merely a diseased activity of the imagination, but that my prevision of incalculable words and actions proved it to have a fixed relation to the mental process in other minds. But this superadded consciousness, wearying and annoying enough when it urged on me the trivial experience of indifferent people, became an intense pain and grief when it seemed to be opening to me the souls of those who were in a close relation to me—when the rational talk, the graceful attentions, the wittily-turned phrases, and the kindly deeds, which used to make the web of their characters, were seen as if thrust asunder by a microscopic vision, that showed all the intermediate frivolities, all the suppressed egoism, all the struggling chaos of puerilities, meanness, vague capricious memories, and indolent makeshift thoughts, from which human words and deeds emerge like leaflets covering a fermenting heap.

At Basle we were joined by my brother Alfred, now a handsome, self-confident man of six-and-twenty—a thorough contrast to my fragile, nervous, ineffectual self. I believe I was held to have a sort of half-womanish, half-ghostly beauty; for the portrait-painters, who are thick as weeds at Geneva, had often asked me to sit to them, and I had been the model of a dying minstrel in a fancy picture. But I thoroughly disliked my own physique and nothing but the belief that it was a condition of poetic genius would have reconciled me to it. That brief hope was quite fled, and I saw in my face now nothing but the stamp of a morbid organization, framed for passive suffering—too feeble for the sublime resistance of poetic production. Alfred, from whom I had been almost constantly separated, and who, in his present stage of character and appearance, came before me as a perfect stranger, was bent on being extremely friendly and brother-like to me. He had the superficial kindness of a good-humoured, self-satisfied nature, that fears no rivalry, and has encountered no contrarieties. I am not sure that my disposition was good enough for me to have been quite free from envy towards him, even if our desires had not clashed, and if I had been in the healthy human condition which admits of generous confidence and charitable construction. There must always have been an antipathy between our natures. As it was, he became in a few weeks an object of intense hatred to me; and when he entered the room, still more when he spoke, it was as if a sensation of grating metal had set my teeth on edge. My diseased consciousness was more intensely and continually occupied with his thoughts and emotions, than with those of any other person who came in my way. I was perpetually exasperated with the petty promptings of his conceit and his love of patronage, with his self-complacent belief in Bertha Grant's passion for him, with his half-pitying contempt for me—seen not in the ordinary indications of intonation and phrase and slight action, which an acute and suspicious mind is on the watch for, but in all their naked skinless complication.

For we were rivals, and our desires clashed, though he was not aware of it. I have said nothing yet of the effect Bertha Grant produced in me on a nearer acquaintance. That effect was chiefly determined by the fact that she made the only exception, among all the human beings about me, to my unhappy gift of insight. About Bertha I was always in a state of uncertainty: I could watch the expression of her face, and speculate on its meaning; I could ask for her opinion with the real interest of ignorance; I could listen for her words and watch for her smile with hope and fear: she had for me the fascination of an unravelled destiny. I say it was this fact that chiefly determined the strong effect she produced on me: for, in the abstract, no womanly character could seem to have less affinity for that of a shrinking, romantic, passionate youth than Bertha's. She was keen, sarcastic, unimaginative, prematurely cynical, remaining critical and unmoved in the most impressive scenes, inclined to dissect all my favourite poems, and especially contemptuous towards the German lyrics which were my pet literature at that time. To this moment I am unable to define my feeling towards her: it was not ordinary boyish admiration, for she was the very opposite, even to the colour of her hair, of the ideal woman who still remained to me the type of loveliness; and she was without that enthusiasm for the great and good, which, even at the moment of her strongest dominion over me, I should have declared to be the highest element of character. But there is no tyranny more complete than that which a self-centred negative nature exercises over a morbidly sensitive nature perpetually craving sympathy and support. The most independent people feel the effect of a man's silence in heightening their value for his opinion—feel an additional triumph in conquering the reverence of a critic habitually captious and satirical: no wonder, then, that an enthusiastic self-distrusting youth should watch and wait before the closed secret of a sarcastic woman's face, as if it were the shrine of the doubtfully benignant deity who ruled his destiny. For a young enthusiast is unable to imagine the total negation in another mind of the emotions which are stirring his own: they may be feeble, latent, inactive, he thinks, but they are there—they may be called forth; sometimes, in moments of happy hallucination, he believes they may be there in all the greater strength because he sees no outward sign of them. And this effect, as I have intimated, was heightened to its utmost intensity in me, because Bertha was the only being who remained for me in the mysterious seclusion of soul that renders such youthful delusion possible. Doubtless there was another sort of fascination at work—that subtle physical attraction which delights in cheating our psychological predictions, and in compelling the men who paint sylphs, to fall in love with some *bonne et brave femme*, heavy-heeled and freckled.

Bertha's behaviour towards me was such as to encourage all my illusions, to heighten my boyish passion, and make me more and more dependent on her smiles. Looking back with my present wretched knowledge I conclude that her vanity and love of power were intensely gratified by the belief that I had fainted on first seeing her purely from the strong impression her person had produced on me. The most prosaic woman likes to believe herself the object of a violent, a poetic passion; and without a grain of romance in her, Bertha had that spirit of intrigue which gave piquancy to the idea that the brother of the man she meant to marry was dying with love and jealousy for her sake. That she meant to marry my brother, was what at that time I did not believe; for though he was assiduous in his attentions to her, and I knew well enough that both he and my father had made up their minds to this result, there was not yet an understood engagement—there had been no explicit declaration; and Bertha habitually, while she flirted with my brother, and accepted his homage in a way that implied to him a thorough recognition of its intention, made me believe, by the subtlest looks and phrases—feminine nothings which could never be quoted against her—that he was really the object of her secret ridicule; that she thought him, as I did, a coxcomb, whom she would have pleasure in disappointing. Me she openly petted in my brother's presence, as if I were too young and sickly ever to be thought of as a lover; and that was the view he took of me. But I believe she must inwardly have delighted in the tremors into which she threw me by the coaxing way in which she patted my curls, while she laughed at my quotations. Such caresses were always given in the presence of our friends; for when we were alone together, she affected a much greater distance towards me, and now and then took the opportunity, by words or slight actions, to stimulate my foolish timid hope that she really preferred me. And why should she not follow her inclination? I was not in so advantageous a position as my brother, but I had fortune, I was not a year younger than she was, and she was an heiress, who would soon be of age to decide for herself.

The fluctuations of hope and fear, confined to this one channel, made each day in her presence a delicious torment. There was one deliberate act of hers which especially helped to intoxicate me. When we were at Vienna her twentieth birthday occurred, and as she was very fond of ornaments, we all took the opportunity of the splendid jewellers' shops in that Teutonic Paris to purchase her a birthday present of jewellery. Mine, naturally, was the least expensive; it was an opal ring—the opal was my favourite stone, because it seems to blush and turn pale as if it had a soul. I told Bertha so when I gave it her, and said that it was an emblem of the poetic nature, changing with the changing light of heaven and of woman's eyes. In the evening she appeared elegantly dressed, and wearing conspicuously all the birthday presents except mine. I looked eagerly at her fingers, but saw no opal. I had no opportunity of noticing this to her during the evening; but the next day, when I found her seated near the window alone, after breakfast, I said, "You scorn to wear my poor opal. I should have remembered that you despised poetic natures, and should have given you coral, or turquoise, or some other opaque unresponsive stone." "Do I despise it," she answered, taking hold of a delicate gold chain which she always wore round her neck and drawing out the end from her bosom with my ring hanging to it; "it hurts me a little, I can tell you," she said, with her usual dubious smile, "to wear it in that secret place; and since your poetical nature is so stupid as to prefer a more public position, I shall not endure the pain any longer."

She took off the ring from the chain and put it on her finger, smiling still, while the blood rushed to my cheeks, and I could not trust myself to say a word of entreaty that she would keep the ring where it was before.

I was completely fooled by this, and for two days shut myself up in my own room whenever Bertha was absent, that I might intoxicate myself afresh with the thought of this scene and all it implied.

I should mention that during these two months—which seemed a long life to me from the novelty and intensity of the pleasures and pains I underwent—my diseased participation in other people's consciousness continued to torment me; now it was my father, and now my brother, now Mrs. Filmore or her husband, and now our German courier, whose stream of thought rushed upon me like a ringing in the ears not to be got rid of, though it allowed my own impulses and ideas to continue their uninterrupted course. It was like a preternaturally heightened sense of hearing, making audible to one a roar of sound where others find perfect stillness. The weariness and disgust of this involuntary intrusion into other souls was counteracted only by my ignorance of Bertha, and my growing passion for her; a passion enormously stimulated, if not produced, by that ignorance. She was my oasis of mystery in the dreary desert of knowledge. I had never allowed my diseased condition to betray itself, or to drive me into any unusual speech or action, except once, when, in a moment of peculiar bitterness against my brother, I had forestalled some words which I knew he was going to utter—a clever observation, which he had prepared beforehand. He had occasionally a slightly-affected hesitation in his speech, and when he paused an instant after the second word, my impatience and jealousy impelled me to continue the speech for him, as if it were something we had both learned by rote. He coloured and looked astonished, as well as annoyed; and the words had no sooner escaped my lips than I felt a shock of alarm lest such an anticipation of words—very far from being words of course, easy to divine—

should have betrayed me as an exceptional being, a sort of quiet energumen, whom everyone, Bertha above all, would shudder at and avoid. But I magnified, as usual, the impression any word or deed of mine could produce on others; for no one gave any sign of having noticed my interruption as more than a rudeness, to be forgiven me on the score of my feeble nervous condition.

While this superadded consciousness of the actual was almost constant with me, I had never had a recurrence of that distinct prevision which I have described in relation to my first interview with Bertha; and I was waiting with eager curiosity to know whether or not my vision of Prague would prove to have been an instance of the same kind. A few days after the incident of the opal ring, we were paying one of our frequent visits to the Lichtenberg Palace. I could never look at many pictures in succession; for pictures, when they are at all powerful, affect me so strongly that one or two exhaust all my capability of contemplation. This morning I had been looking at Giorgione's picture of the cruel-eyed woman, said to be a likeness of Lucrezia Borgia. I had stood long alone before it, fascinated by the terrible reality of that cunning, relentless face, till I felt a strange poisoned sensation, as if I had long been inhaling a fatal odour, and was just beginning to be conscious of its effects. Perhaps even then I should not have moved away, if the rest of the party had not returned to this room, and announced that they were going to the Belvedere Gallery to settle a bet which had arisen between my brother and Mr. Filmore about a portrait. I followed them dreamily, and was hardly alive to what occurred till they had all gone up to the gallery, leaving me below; for I refused to come within sight of another picture that day. I made my way to the Grand Terrace, since it was agreed that we should saunter in the gardens when the dispute had been decided. I had been sitting here a short space, vaguely conscious of trim gardens, with a city and green hills in the distance, when, wishing to avoid the proximity of the sentinel, I rose and walked down the broad stone steps, intending to seat myself farther on in the gardens. Just as I reached the gravel-walk, I felt an arm slipped within mine, and a light hand gently pressing my wrist. In the same instant a strange intoxicating numbness passed over me, like the continuance or climax of the sensation I was still feeling from the gaze of Lucrezia Borgia. The gardens, the summer sky, the consciousness of Bertha's arm being within mine, all vanished, and I seemed to be suddenly in darkness, out of which there gradually broke a dim firelight, and I felt myself sitting in my father's leather chair in the library at home. I knew the fireplace—the dogs for the wood-fire—the black marble chimneypiece with the white marble medallion of the dying Cleopatra in the centre. Intense and hopeless misery was pressing on my soul; the light became stronger, for Bertha was entering with a candle in her hand—Bertha, my wife—with cruel eyes, with green jewels and green leaves on her white ball-dress; every hateful thought within her present to me. . . . "Madman, idiot! why don't you kill yourself, then?" It was a moment of hell. I saw into her pitiless soul—saw its barren worldliness, its scorching hate—and felt it clothe me round like an air I was obliged to breathe. She came with her candle and stood over me with a bitter smile of contempt; I saw the great emerald brooch on her bosom, a studded serpent with diamond eyes. I shuddered—I despised this woman with the barren soul and mean thoughts; but I felt helpless before her, as if she clutched my bleeding heart, and would clutch it till the last drop of life-blood ebbed away. She was my wife, and we hated each other. Gradually the hearth, the dim library, the candle-light disappeared—seemed to melt away into a background of light, the green serpent with the diamond eyes remaining a dark image on the retina. Then I had a sense of my eyelids quivering, and the living daylight broke in upon me; I saw gardens, and heard voices; I was seated on the steps of the Belvedere Terrace, and my friends were round me.

The tumult of mind into which I was thrown by this hideous vision made me ill for several days, and prolonged our stay at Vienna. I shuddered with horror as the scene recurred to me; and it recurred constantly, with all its minutiæ, as if they had been burnt into my memory; and yet, such is the madness of the human heart under the influence of its immediate desires, I felt a wild hell-braving joy that Bertha was to be mine; for the fulfilment of my former prevision concerning her first appearance before me, left me little hope that this last hideous glimpse of the future was the mere diseased play of my own mind, and had no relation to external realities. One thing alone I looked towards as a possible means of casting doubt on my terrible conviction—the discovery that my vision of Prague had been false—and Prague was the next city on our route.

Meanwhile, I was no sooner in Bertha's society again, than I was as completely under her sway as before. What if I saw into the heart of Bertha, the matured woman—Bertha, my wife? Bertha, the *girl*, was a fascinating secret to me still: I trembled under her touch; I felt the witchery of her presence; I yearned to be assured of her love. The fear of poison is feeble against the sense of thirst. Nay, I was just as jealous of my brother as before—just as much irritated by his small patronising ways; for my pride, my diseased sensibility, were there as they had always been, and winced as inevitably under every offence as my eye winced from an intruding mote. The future, even when brought within the compass of feeling by a vision that made me shudder, had still no more than the force of an idea, compared with the force of present emotion—of my love for Bertha, of my dislike and jealousy towards my brother.

It is an old story, that men sell themselves to the tempter, and sign a bond with their blood, because it is only to take effect at a distant day; then rush on to snatch the cup their souls thirst after with an impulse not the less savage because there is a dark shadow beside them for evermore. There is no short cut, no patent tram-road, to wisdom: after all the centuries of invention, the soul's path lies through the thorny wilderness which must be still trodden in solitude, with bleeding feet, with sobs for help, as it was trodden by them of old time.

My mind speculated eagerly on the means by which I should become my brother's successful rival, for I was still too timid, in my ignorance of Bertha's actual feeling, to venture on any step that would urge from her an avowal of it. I thought I should gain confidence even for this, if my vision of Prague proved to have been veracious; and yet, the horror of that certitude! Behind the slim girl Bertha, whose words and looks I watched for, whose touch was bliss, there stood continually that Bertha with the fuller form, the harder eyes, the more rigid mouth—with the barren, selfish soul laid bare; no longer a fascinating secret, but a measured fact, urging itself perpetually on my unwilling sight. Are you unable to give me your sympathy—you who read this? Are you unable to imagine this double consciousness at work within me, flowing on like two parallel streams which never mingle their waters and blend into a common hue? Yet you must have known something of the presentiments that spring from an insight at war with passion; and my visions were only like presentiments intensified to horror. You have known the powerlessness of ideas before the might of impulse; and my visions, when once they had passed into memory, were mere ideas—pale shadows that beckoned in vain, while my hand was grasped by the living and the loved.

In after-days I thought with bitter regret that if I had foreseen something more or something different—if instead of that hideous vision which poisoned the passion it could not destroy, or if even along with it I could have had a foreshadowing of that moment when I looked on my brother's face for the last time, some softening influence would have been shed over my feeling towards him: pride and hatred would surely have been subdued into pity, and the record of those hidden sins would have been shortened. But this is one of the vain thoughts with which we men flatter ourselves. We try to believe that the egoism within us would have easily been melted, and that it was only the narrowness of our knowledge which hemmed in our generosity, our awe, our human piety, and hindered them from submerging our hard indifference to the sensations and emotions of our fellows. Our tenderness and self-renunciation seem strong when our egoism has had its day—when, after our mean striving for a triumph that is to be another's loss, the triumph comes suddenly, and we shudder at it, because it is held out by the chill hand of death.

Our arrival in Prague happened at night, and I was glad of this, for it seemed like a deferring of a terribly decisive moment, to be in the city for hours without seeing it. As we were not to remain long in Prague, but to go on speedily to Dresden, it was proposed that we should drive out the next morning and take a general view of the place, as well as visit some of its specially interesting spots, before the heat became oppressive—for we were in August, and the season was hot and dry. But it happened that the ladies were rather late at their morning toilet, and to my father's politely-repressed but perceptible annoyance, we were not in the carriage till the morning was far advanced. I thought with a sense of relief, as we entered the Jews' quarter, where we were to visit the old synagogue, that we should be kept in this flat, shut-up part of the city, until we should all be too tired and too warm to go farther, and so we should return without seeing more than the streets through which we had already passed. That would give me another day's suspense—suspense, the only form in which a fearful spirit knows the solace of hope. But, as I stood under the blackened, groined arches of that old synagogue, made dimly visible by the seven thin candles in the sacred lamp, while our Jewish cicerone reached down the Book of the Law, and read to us in its ancient tongue—I felt a shuddering impression that this strange building, with its shrunken lights, this surviving withered remnant of mediæval Judaism, was of a piece with my vision. Those darkened dusty Christian saints, with their loftier arches and their larger candles, needed the consolatory scorn with which they might point to a more shrivelled death-in-life than their own.

As I expected, when we left the Jews' quarter the elders of our party wished to return to the hotel. But now, instead of rejoicing in this, as I had done beforehand, I felt a sudden overpowering impulse to go on at once to the bridge, and put an end to the suspense I had been wishing to protract. I declared, with unusual decision, that I would get out of the carriage and walk on alone; they might return without me. My father, thinking this merely a sample of my usual "poetic nonsense," objected that I should only do myself harm by walking in the heat; but when I persisted, he said angrily that I might follow my own absurd devices, but that Schmidt (our courier) must go with me. I assented to this, and set off with Schmidt towards the bridge. I had no sooner passed from under the archway of the grand old gate leading on to the bridge, than a trembling seized me, and I turned cold under the midday sun; yet I went on; I was in search of something—a small detail which I remembered with special intensity as part of my vision. There it was—the patch of rainbow light on the pavement transmitted through a lamp in the shape of a star.

CHAPTER II

BEFORE the autumn was at an end, and while the brown leaves still stood thick on the beeches in our park, my brother and Bertha were engaged to each other, and it was understood that their marriage was to take place early in the next spring. In spite of the certainty I had felt from that moment on the bridge at Prague, that Bertha would one day be my wife, my constitutional timidity and distrust had continued to benumb me, and the words in which I had sometimes premeditated a confession of my love, had died away unuttered. The same conflict had gone on within me as before—the longing for an assurance of love from Bertha's lips, the dread lest a word of contempt and denial should fall upon me like a corrosive acid. What was the conviction of a distant necessity to me? I trembled under a present glance, I hungered after a present joy, I was clogged and chilled by a present fear. And so the days passed on: I witnessed Bertha's engagement and heard her marriage discussed as if I were under a conscious nightmare—knowing it was a dream that would vanish, but feeling stifled under the grasp of hard-clutching fingers.

When I was not in Bertha's presence—and I was with her very often, for she continued to treat me with a playful patronage that wakened no jealousy in my brother—I spent my time chiefly in wandering, in strolling, or taking long rides while the daylight lasted, and then shutting myself up with my unread books; for books had lost the power of chaining my attention. My self-consciousness was heightened to that pitch of intensity in which our own emotions take the form of a drama which urges itself imperatively on our contemplation, and we begin to weep, less under the sense of our suffering than at the thought of it. I felt a sort of pitying anguish over the pathos of my own lot: the lot of a being finely organized for pain, but with hardly any fibres that responded to pleasure—to whom the idea of future evil robbed the present of its joy, and for whom the idea of future good did not still the uneasiness of a present yearning or a present dread. I went dumbly through that stage of the poet's suffering, in which he feels the delicious pang of utterance, and makes an image of his sorrows.

I was left entirely without remonstrance concerning this dreamy wayward life: I knew my father's thought about me: "That lad will never be good for anything in life: he may waste his years in an insignificant way on the income that falls to him: I shall not trouble myself about a career for him."

One mild morning in the beginning of November, it happened that

I was standing outside the portico patting lazy old Cæsar, a Newfoundland almost blind with age, the only dog that ever took any notice of me—for the very dogs shunned me, and fawned on the happier people about me—when the groom brought up my brother's horse which was to carry him to the hunt, and my brother himself appeared at the door, florid, broad-chested, and self-complacent, feeling what a good-natured fellow he was not to behave insolently to us all on the strength of his great advantages.

"Latimer, old boy," he said to me in a tone of compassionate cordiality, "what a pity it is you don't have a run with the hounds now and then! The finest thing in the world for low spirits!"

"Low spirits!" I thought bitterly, as he rode away; "that is the sort of phrase with which coarse, narrow natures like yours think to describe experience of which you can know no more than your horse knows. It is to such as you that the good of this world falls: ready dulness, healthy selfishness, good-tempered conceit—these are the keys to happiness."

The quick thought came, that my selfishness was even stronger than his—it was only a suffering selfishness instead of an enjoying one. But then, again, my exasperating insight into Alfred's self-complacent soul, his freedom from all the doubts and fears, the unsatisfied yearnings, the exquisite tortures of sensitiveness, that had made the web of my life, seemed to absolve me from all bonds towards him. This man needed no pity, no love; those fine influences would have been as little felt by him as the delicate white mist is felt by the rock it caresses. There was no evil in store for *him:* if he was not to marry Bertha, it would be because he had found a lot pleasanter to himself.

Mr. Filmore's house lay not more than half a mile beyond our own gates, and whenever I knew my brother was gone in another direction, I went there for the chance of finding Bertha at home. Later on in the day I walked thither. By a rare accident she was alone, and we walked out in the grounds together, for she seldom went on foot beyond the trimly-swept gravel-walks. I remember what a beautiful sylph she looked to me as the low November sun shone on her blond hair, and she tripped along teasing me with her usual light banter, to which I listened half fondly, half moodily; it was all the sign Bertha's mysterious inner self ever made to me. To-day perhaps the moodiness predominated, for I had not yet shaken off the access of jealous hate which my brother had raised in me by his parting patronage. Suddenly I interrupted and startled her by saying, almost fiercely, "Bertha, how can you love Alfred?"

She looked at me with surprise for a moment, but soon her light smile came again, and she answered sarcastically, "Why do you suppose I love him?"

"How can you ask that, Bertha?"

"What! your wisdom thinks I must love the man I'm going to marry? The most unpleasant thing in the world. I should quarrel with him; I should be jealous of him; our *ménage* would be conducted in a very ill-bred manner. A little quiet contempt contributes greatly to the elegance of life."

"Bertha, that is not your real feeling. Why do you delight in trying to deceive me by inventing such cynical speeches?"

"I need never take the trouble of invention in order to deceive you, my small Tasso"—(that was the mocking name she usually gave me). "The easiest way to deceive a poet is to tell him the truth."

She was testing the validity of her epigram in a daring way, and for a moment the shadow of my vision—the Bertha whose soul was no secret to me—passed between me and the radiant girl, the playful sylph whose feelings were a fascinating mystery. I suppose I must have shuddered, or betrayed in some other way my momentary chill of horror.

"Tasso!" she said, seizing my wrist, and peeping round into my face, "are you really beginning to discern what a heartless girl I am? Why, you are not half the poet I thought you were; you are actually capable of believing the truth about me."

The shadow passed from between us, and was no longer the object nearest to me. The girl whose light fingers grasped me, whose elfish charming face looked into mine—who, I thought, was betraying an interest in my feelings that she would not have directly avowed—this warm breathing presence again possessed my senses and imagination like a returning siren melody which had been overpowered for an instant by the roar of threatening waves. It was a moment as delicious to me as the waking up to a consciousness of youth after a dream of middle age. I forgot everything but my passion, and said with swimming eyes:

"Bertha, shall you love me when we are first married? I wouldn't mind if you really loved me only for a little while."

Her look of astonishment, as she loosed my hand and started away from me, recalled me to a sense of my strange, my criminal indiscretion.

"Forgive me," I said, hurriedly, as soon as I could speak again; "I did not know what I was saying."

"Ah, Tasso's mad fit has come on, I see," she answered quietly, for she had recovered herself sooner than I had. "Let him go home and keep his head cool. I must go in, for the sun is setting."

I left her—full of indignation against myself. I had let slip words which, if she reflected on them, might rouse in her a suspicion of my abnormal mental condition—a suspicion which of all things I dreaded.

And besides that, I was ashamed of the apparent baseness I had committed in uttering them to my brother's betrothed wife. I wandered home slowly, entering our park through a private gate instead of by the lodges. As I approached the house, I saw a man dashing off at full speed from the stable-yard across the park. Had any accident happened at home? No; perhaps it was only one of my father's peremptory business errands that required this headlong haste.

Nevertheless I quickened my pace without any distinct motive, and was soon at the house. I will not dwell on the scene I found there. My brother was dead—had been pitched from his horse, and killed on the spot by a concussion of the brain.

I went up to the room where he lay, and where my father was seated beside him with a look of rigid despair. I had shunned my father more than anyone since our return home, for the radical antipathy between our natures made my insight into his inner self a constant affliction to me. But now, as I went up to him, and stood beside him in sad silence, I felt the presence of a new element that blended us as we had never been blent before. My father had been one of the most successful men in the money-getting world: he had had no sentimental sufferings, no illness. The heaviest trouble that had befallen him was the death of his first wife. But he married my mother soon after; and I remember he seemed exactly the same, to my keen childish observation, the week after her death as before. But now, at last, a sorrow had come—the sorrow of old age, which suffers the more from the crushing of its pride and its hopes, in proportion as the pride and hope are narrow and prosaic. His son was to have been married soon—would probably have stood for the borough at the next election. That son's existence was the best motive that could be alleged for making new purchases of land every year to round off the estate. It is a dreary thing to live on doing the same things year after year, without knowing why we do them. Perhaps the tragedy of disappointed youth and passion is less piteous than the tragedy of disappointed age and worldliness.

As I saw into the desolation of my father's heart, I felt a movement of deep pity towards him, which was the beginning of a new affection—an affection that grew and strengthened in spite of the strange bitterness with which he regarded me in the first month or two after my brother's death. If it had not been for the softening influence of my compassion for him—the first deep compassion I had ever felt—I should have been stung by the perception that my father transferred the inheritance of an eldest son to me with a mortified sense that fate had compelled him to the unwelcome course of caring for me as an important being. It was only in spite of himself that he began to think of me with anxious regard. There is hardly any neglected child for whom death has made vacant a more favoured place, who will not understand what I mean.

Gradually, however, my new deference to his wishes, the effect of that patience which was born of my pity for him, won upon his affection, and he began to please himself with the endeavour to make me fill my brother's place as fully as my feebler personality would admit. I saw that the prospect which by and by presented itself of my becoming Bertha's husband was welcome to him, and he even contemplated in my case what he had not intended in my brother's—that his son and daughter-in-law should make one household with him. My softened feeling towards my father made this the happiest time I had known since childhood—these last months in which I retained the delicious illusion of loving Bertha, of longing and doubting and hoping that she might love me. She behaved with a certain new consciousness and distance towards me after my brother's death; and I too was under a double constraint—that of delicacy towards my brother's memory, and of anxiety as to the impression my abrupt words had left on her mind. But the additional screen this mutual reserve erected between us only brought me more completely under her power: no matter how empty the adytum, so that the veil be thick enough. So absolute is our soul's need of something hidden and uncertain for the maintenance of that doubt and hope and effort which are the breath of its life, that if the whole future were laid bare to us beyond to-day, the interest of all mankind would be bent on the hours that lie between; we should pant after the uncertainties of our one morning and our one afternoon; we should rush fiercely to the Exchange for our last possibility of speculation, of success, of disappointment: we should have a glut of political prophets foretelling a crisis or a no-crisis within the only twenty-four hours left open to prophecy. Conceive the condition of the human mind if all propositions whatsoever were self-evident except one, which was to become self-evident at the close of a summer's day, but in the meantime might be the subject of question, of hypothesis, of debate. Art and philosophy, literature and science, would fasten like bees on that one proposition which had the honey of probability in it, and be the more eager because their enjoyment would end with sunset. Our impulses, our spiritual activities, no more adjust themselves to the idea of their future nullity, than the beating of our heart, or the irritability of our muscles.

Bertha, the slim, fair-haired girl, whose present thoughts and emotions were an enigma to me amidst the fatiguing obviousness of the other minds around me, was as absorbing to me as a single unknown to-day—as a single hypothetic proposition to remain problematic till sunset; and all the cramped, hemmed-in belief and disbelief, trust and distrust, of my nature, welled out in this one narrow channel.

And she made me believe that she loved me. Without ever quitting her tone of *badinage* and playful superiority, she intoxicated me with the sense that I was necessary to her, that she was never at ease unless I was near her, submitting to her playful tyranny. It costs a woman so little effort to besot us in this way. A half-repressed word, a moment's unexpected silence, even an easy fit of petulance on our account, will serve us as *hashish* for a long while. Out of the subtlest web of scarcely perceptible signs, she set me weaving the fancy that she had always unconsciously loved me better than Alfred, but that, with the ignorant fluttered sensibility of a young girl, she had been imposed on by the charm that lay for her in the distinction of being admired and chosen by a man who made so brilliant a figure in the world as my brother. She satirised herself in a very graceful way for her vanity and ambition. What was it to me that I had the light of my wretched prevision on the fact that now it was I who possessed at least all but the personal part of my brother's advantages? Our sweet illusions are half of them conscious illusions, like effects of colour that we know to be made up of tinsel, broken glass, and rags.

We were married eighteen months after Alfred's death, one cold, clear morning in April, when there came hail and sunshine both together; and Bertha, in her white silk and pale-green leaves, and the pale hues of her hair and face, looked like the spirit of the morning. My father was happier than he had thought of being again: my marriage, he felt sure, would complete the desirable modification of my character, and make me practical and worldly enough to take my place in society among sane men. For he delighted in Bertha's tact and acuteness, and felt sure she would be mistress of me, and make me what she chose: I was only twenty-one, and madly in love with her. Poor father! He kept that hope a little while after our first year of marriage, and it was not quite extinct when paralysis came and saved him from utter disappointment.

I shall hurry through the rest of my story, not dwelling so much as I have hitherto done on my inward experience. When people are well known to each other, they talk rather of what befalls them externally, leaving their feelings and sentiments to be inferred.

We lived in a round of visits for some time after our return home, giving splendid dinner-parties, and making a sensation in our neighbourhood by the new lustre of our equipage, for my father had reserved this display of his increased wealth for the period of his son's marriage; and we gave our acquaintances liberal opportunity for remarking that it was a pity I made so poor a figure as an heir and a bridegroom. The nervous fatigue of this existence, the insincerities and platitudes which I had to live through twice over—through my inner and outward sense—would have been maddening to me, if I had not had that sort of intoxicated callousness which came from the delights of a first passion. A bride and bridegroom, surrounded by all the appliances of wealth, hurried through the day by the whirl of society, filling their solitary moments with hastily-snatched caresses, are prepared for their future life together as the novice is prepared for the cloister—by experiencing its utmost contrast.

Through all these crowded excited months, Bertha's inward self remained shrouded from me, and I still read her thoughts only through the language of her lips and demeanour: I had still the human interest of wondering whether what I did and said pleased her, of longing to hear a word of affection, of giving a delicious exaggeration of meaning to her smile. But I was conscious of a growing difference in her manner towards me; sometimes strong enough to be called haughty coldness, cutting and chilling me as the hail had done that came across the sunshine on our marriage morning; sometimes only perceptible in the dexterous avoidance of a *tête-à-tête* walk or dinner to which I had been looking forward. I had been deeply pained by this—had even felt a sort of crushing of the heart, from the sense that my brief day of happiness was near its setting; but still I remained dependent on Bertha, eager for the last rays of a bliss that would soon be gone for ever, hoping and watching for some afterglow more beautiful from the impending night.

I remember—how should I not remember?—the time when that dependance and hope utterly left me, when the sadness I had felt in Bertha's growing estrangement became a joy that I looked back upon with longing as a man might look back on the last pains in a paralysed limb. It was just after the close of my father's last illness, which had necessarily withdrawn us from society and thrown us more upon each other. It was the evening of my father's death. On that evening the veil which had shrouded Bertha's soul from me—had made me find in her alone among my fellow-beings the blessed possibility of mystery, and doubt, and expectation—was first withdrawn. Perhaps it was the first day since the beginning of my passion for her, in which that passion was completely neutralised by the presence of an absorbing feeling of another kind. I had been watching by my father's deathbed: I had been witnessing the last fitful yearning glance his soul had cast back on the spent inheritance of life—the last faint consciousness of love he had gathered from the pressure of my hand. What are all our personal loves when we have been sharing in that supreme agony? In the first moments when we come away from the presence of death, every other relation to the living is merged, to our feeling, in the great relation of a common nature and a common destiny.

In that state of mind I joined Bertha in her private sitting-room. She was seated in a leaning posture on a settee, with her back towards the door; the great rich coils of her pale blond hair surmounting her small neck, visible above the back of the settee. I remember, as I closed the door behind me, a cold tremulousness seizing me, and a vague sense of being hated and lonely—vague and strong, like a presentiment. I know how I looked at that moment, for I saw myself in Bertha's thought as she lifted her cutting grey eyes, and looked at me: a miserable ghost-seer, surrounded by phantoms in the noonday, trembling under a breeze when the leaves were still, without appetite for the common objects of human desires, but pining after the moonbeams. We were front to front with each other, and judged each other. The terrible moment of complete illumination had come to me, and I saw that the darkness had hidden no landscape from me, but only a blank prosaic wall: from that evening forth, through the sickening years which followed, I saw all round the narrow room of this woman's soul—saw petty artifice and mere negation where I had delighted to believe in coy sensibilities and in wit at war with latent feeling—saw the light floating vanities of the girl defining themselves into the systematic coquetry, the scheming selfishness, of the woman—saw repulsion and antipathy harden into cruel hatred, giving pain only for the sake of wreaking itself.

For Bertha too, after her kind, felt the bitterness of disillusion. She had believed that my wild poet's passion for her would make me her slave; and that, being her slave, I should execute her will in all things. With the essential shallowness of a negative, unimaginative nature, she was unable to conceive the fact that sensibilities were anything else than weaknesses. She had thought my weaknesses would put me in her power, and she found them unmanageable forces. Our positions were reversed. Before marriage she had completely mastered my imagination, for she was a secret to me; and I created the unknown thought before which I trembled as if it were hers. But now that her soul was laid open to me, now that I was compelled to share the privacy of her motives, to follow all the petty devices that preceded her words and acts, she found herself powerless with me, except to produce in me the chill shudder of repulsion—powerless, because I could be acted on by no lever within her reach. I was dead to worldly ambitions, to social vanities, to all the incentives within the compass of her narrow imagination, and I lived under influences utterly invisible to her.

She was really pitiable to have such a husband, and so all the world thought. A graceful, brilliant woman, like Bertha, who smiled on morning callers, made a figure in ballrooms, and was capable of that light repartee which, from such a woman, is accepted as wit, was secure of carrying off all sympathy from a husband who was sickly, abstracted, and, as some suspected, crack-brained. Even the servants in our house gave her the balance of their regard and pity. For there were no audible quarrels between us; our alienation, our repulsion from each other, lay within the silence of our own hearts; and if the mistress went out a great deal, and seemed to dislike the master's society, was it not natural, poor thing? The master was odd. I was kind and just to my dependants, but I excited in them a shrinking, half-contemptuous pity; for this class of men and women are but slightly determined in their estimate of others by general considerations, or even experience, of character. They judge of persons as they judge of coins, and value those who pass current at a high rate.

After a time I interfered so little with Bertha's habits that it might seem wonderful how her hatred towards me could grow so intense and active as it did. But she had begun to suspect, by some involuntary betrayal of mine, that there was an abnormal power of penetration in me—that fitfully, at least, I was strangely cognisant of her thoughts and intentions, and she began to be haunted by a terror of me, which alternated every now and then with defiance. She meditated continually how the incubus could be shaken off her life—how she could be freed from this hateful bond to a being whom she at once despised as an imbecile, and dreaded as an inquisitor. For a long while she lived in the hope that my evident wretchedness would drive me to the commission of suicide; but suicide was not in my nature. I was too completely swayed by the sense that I was in the grasp of unknown forces, to believe in my power of self-release. Towards my own destiny I had become entirely passive; for my one ardent desire had spent itself, and impulse no longer predominated over knowledge. For this reason I never thought of taking any steps towards a complete separation, which would have made our alienation evident to the world. Why should I rush for help to a new course, when I was only suffering from the consequences of a deed which had been the act of my intensest will? That would have been the logic of one who had desires to gratify, and I had no desires. But Bertha and I lived more and more aloof from each other. The rich find it easy to live married and apart.

That course of our life which I have indicated in a few sentences filled the space of years. So much misery—so slow and hideous a growth of hatred and sin, may be compressed into a sentence! And men judge of each other's lives through this summary medium. They epitomize the experience of their fellow-mortal, and pronounce judgment on him in neat syntax, and feel themselves wise and virtuous—conquerors over the temptations they define in well-selected predicates. Seven years of wretchedness glide glibly over the lips of the man who has never counted them out in moments of chill disappointment, of head and heart throbbings, of dread and vain wrestling, of remorse and despair. We learn *words* by rote, but not their meaning; *that* must be paid for with our life-blood, and printed in the subtle fibres of our nerves.

But I will hasten to finish my story. Brevity is justified at once to those who readily understand, and to those who will never understand.

Some years after my father's death, I was sitting by the dim firelight in my library one January evening—sitting in the leather chair that used to be my father's—when Bertha appeared at the door, with a candle in her hand, and advanced towards me. I knew the ball-dress she had on—the white ball-dress, with the green jewels, shone upon by the light of the wax candle which lit up the medallion of the dying Cleopatra on the mantelpiece. Why did she come to me before going out? I had not seen her in the library, which was my habitual place for months. Why did she stand before me with the candle in her hand, with her cruel contemptuous eyes fixed on me, and the glittering serpent, like a familiar demon, on her breast? For a moment I thought this fulfilment of my vision at Vienna marked some dreadful crisis in my fate, but I saw nothing in Bertha's mind, as she stood before me, except scorn for the look of overwhelming misery with which I sat before her. . . . "Fool, idiot, why don't you kill yourself, then?"—that was her thought. But at length her thoughts reverted to her errand, and she spoke aloud. The apparently indifferent nature of the errand seemed to make a ridiculous anticlimax to my prevision and my agitation.

"I have had to hire a new maid. Fletcher is going to be married, and she wants me to ask you to let her husband have the public-house and farm at Molton. I wish him to have it. You must give the promise now, because Fletcher is going to-morrow morning—and quickly, because I'm in a hurry."

"Very well; you may promise her," I said, indifferently, and Bertha swept out of the library again.

I always shrank from the sight of a new person, and all the more when it was a person whose mental life was likely to weary my reluctant insight with worldly ignorant trivialities. But I shrank especially from the sight of this new maid, because her advent had been announced to me at a moment to which I could not cease to attach some fatality: I had a vague dread that I should find her mixed up with the dreary drama of my life—that some new sickening vision would reveal her to me as an evil genius. When at last I did unavoidably meet her, the vague dread was changed into definite disgust. She was a tall, wiry, dark-eyed woman, this Mrs. Archer, with a face handsome enough to give her coarse hard nature the odious finish of bold, self-confident coquetry. That was enough to make me avoid her, quite apart from the contemptuous feeling with which she contemplated me. I seldom saw her; but I perceived that she rapidly became a favourite with her mistress, and, after the lapse of eight or nine months, I began to be aware that there had arisen in Bertha's mind towards this woman a mingled feeling of fear and dependence, and that this feeling was associated with ill-defined images of candlelight scenes in her dressing-room, and the locking-up of something in Bertha's cabinet. My interviews with my wife had become so brief and so rarely solitary, that I had no opportunity of perceiving these images in her mind with more definiteness. The recollections of the past become contracted in the rapidity of thought till they sometimes bear hardly a more distinct resemblance to the external reality than the forms of an oriental alphabet to the objects that suggested them.

Besides, for the last year or more a modification had been going forward in my mental condition, and was growing more and more marked. My insight into the minds of those around me was becoming dimmer and more fitful, and the ideas that crowded my double consciousness became less and less dependent on any personal contact. All that was personal in me seemed to be suffering a gradual death, so that I was losing the organ through which the personal agitations and projects of others could affect me. But along with this relief from wearisome insight, there was a new development of what I concluded—as I have since found rightly—to be a prevision of external scenes. It was as if the relation between me and my fellow-men was more and more deadened, and my relation to what we call the inanimate was quickened into new life. The more I lived apart from society, and in proportion as my wretchedness subsided from the violent throb of agonised passion into the dulness of habitual pain, the more frequent and vivid became such visions as that I had had of Prague—of strange cities, of sandy plains, of gigantic ruins, of midnight skies with strange bright constellations, of mountain-passes, of grassy nooks flecked with the afternoon sunshine through the boughs: I was in the midst of such scenes, and in all of them one presence seemed to weigh on me in all these mighty shapes—the presence of something unknown and pitiless. For continual suffering had annihilated religious faith within me: to the utterly miserable—the unloving and the unloved—there is no religion possible, no worship but a worship of devils. And beyond all these, and continually recurring, was the vision of my death—the pangs, the suffocation, the last struggle, when life would be grasped at in vain.

Things were in this state near the end of the seventh year. I had become entirely free from insight, from my abnormal cognisance of any other consciousness than my own, and instead of intruding involuntarily into the world of other minds, was living continually in my own solitary future. Bertha was aware that I was greatly changed. To my surprise she had of late seemed to seek opportunities of remaining in my society, and had cultivated that kind of distant yet familiar talk which is customary between a husband and wife who live in polite and irrevocable alienation. I bore this with languid submission, and without feeling enough interest in her motives to be roused into keen observation; yet I could not help perceiving something triumphant and excited in her carriage and the expression of her face—something too subtle to express itself in words or tones, but giving one the idea that she lived in a state of expectation or hopeful suspense. My chief feeling was satisfaction that her inner self was once more shut out from me; and I almost revelled for the moment in the absent melancholy that made me answer her at cross purposes, and betray utter ignorance of what she had been saying. I remember well the look and the smile with which she one day said, after a mistake of this kind on my part: "I used to think you were a clairvoyant, and that was the reason why you were so bitter against other clairvoyants, wanting to keep your monopoly; but I see now you have become rather duller than the rest of the world."

I said nothing in reply. It occurred to me that her recent obtrusion of herself upon me might have been prompted by the wish to test my power of detecting some of her secrets; but I let the thought drop again at once: her motives and her deeds had no interest for me, and whatever pleasures she might be seeking, I had no wish to baulk her. There was still pity in my soul for every living thing, and Bertha was living—was surrounded with possibilities of misery.

Just at this time there occurred an event which roused me somewhat from my inertia, and gave me an interest in the passing moment that I had thought impossible for me. It was a visit from Charles Meunier, who had written me word that he was coming to England for relaxation from too strenuous labour, and would like to see me. Meunier had now a European reputation; but his letter to me expressed that keen remembrance of an early regard, an early debt of sympathy, which is inseparable from nobility of character: and I too felt as if his presence would be to me like a transient resurrection into a happier pre-existence.

He came, and as far as possible, I renewed our old pleasure of making *tête-à-tête* excursions, though, instead of mountains and glaciers and the wide blue lake, we had to content ourselves with mere slopes and ponds and artificial plantations. The years had changed us both, but with what different result! Meunier was now a brilliant figure in society, to whom elegant women pretended to listen, and whose acquaintance was boasted of by noblemen ambitious of brains. He repressed with the utmost delicacy all betrayal of the shock which I am sure he must have received from our meeting, or of a desire to penetrate into my condition and circumstances, and sought by the utmost exertion of his charming social powers to make our reunion agreeable. Bertha was much struck by the unexpected fascinations of a visitor whom she had expected to find presentable only on the score of his celebrity, and put forth all her coquetries and accomplishments. Apparently she succeeded in attracting his admiration, for his manner towards her was attentive and flattering. The effect of his presence on me was so benignant, especially in those renewals of our old *tête-à-tête* wanderings, when he poured forth to me wonderful narratives of his professional experience, that more than once, when his talk turned on the psychological relations of disease, the thought crossed my mind that, if his stay with me were long enough, I might possibly bring myself to tell this man the secrets of my lot. Might there not lie some remedy for *me*, too, in his science? Might there not at least lie some comprehension and sympathy ready for me in his large and susceptible mind? But the thought only flickered feebly now and then, and died out before it could become a wish. The horror I had of again breaking in on the privacy of another soul, made me, by an irrational instinct, draw the shroud of concealment more closely around my own, as we automatically perform the gesture we feel to be wanting in another.

When Meunier's visit was approaching its conclusion, there happened an event which caused some excitement in our household, owing to the surprisingly strong effect it appeared to produce on Bertha—on Bertha, the self-possessed, who usually seemed inaccessible to feminine agitations, and did even her hate in a self-restrained hygienic manner. This event was the sudden severe illness of her maid, Mrs. Archer. I have reserved to this moment the mention of a circumstance which had forced itself on my notice shortly before Meunier's arrival, namely, that there had been some quarrel between Bertha and this maid, apparently during a visit to a distant family, in which she had accompanied her mistress. I had overheard Archer speaking in a tone of bitter insolence, which I should have thought an adequate reason for immediate dismissal. No dismissal followed; on the contrary, Bertha seemed to be silently putting up with personal inconveniences from the exhibitions of this woman's temper. I was the more astonished to observe that her illness seemed a cause of strong solicitude to Bertha; that she was at the bedside night and day, and would allow no one else to officiate as head-nurse. It happened that our family doctor was out on a holiday, an accident which made Meunier's presence in the house doubly welcome, and he apparently entered into the case with an interest which seemed so much stronger than the ordinary professional feeling, that one day when he had fallen into a long fit of silence after visiting her, I said to him:

"Is this a very peculiar case of disease, Meunier?"

"No," he answered, "it is an attack of peritonitis, which will be fatal, but which does not differ physically from many other cases that have come under my observation. But I'll tell you what I have on my mind. I want to make an experiment on this woman, if you will give me permission. It can do her no harm—will give her no pain—for I shall not make it until life is extinct to all purposes of sensation. I want to try the effect of transfusing blood into her arteries after the heart has ceased to beat for some minutes. I have tried the experiment again and again with animals that have died of this disease, with astounding results, and I want to try it on a human subject. I have the small tubes necessary, in a case I have with me, and the rest of the apparatus could be prepared readily. I should use my own blood—take it from my own arm. This woman won't live through the night, I'm convinced, and I want you to promise me your assistance in making the experiment. I can't do without another hand, but it would perhaps not be well to call in a medical assistant from among your provincial doctors. A disagreeable foolish version of the thing might get abroad."

"Have you spoken to my wife on the subject?" I said, "because she appears to be peculiarly sensitive about this woman: she has been a favourite maid."

"To tell you the truth," said Meunier, "I don't want her to know about it. There are always insuperable difficulties with women in these matters, and the effect on the supposed dead body may be startling. You and I will sit up together, and be in readiness. When certain symptoms appear I shall take you in, and at the right moment we must manage to get everyone else out of the room."

I need not give our farther conversation on the subject. He entered very fully into the details, and overcame my repulsion from them, by exciting in me a mingled awe and curiosity concerning the possible results of his experiment.

We prepared everything, and he instructed me in my part as assistant. He had not told Bertha of his absolute conviction that Archer would not survive through the night, and endeavoured to persuade her to leave the patient and take a night's rest. But she was obstinate, suspecting the fact that death was at hand, and supposing that he wished merely to save her nerves. She refused to leave the sickroom. Meunier and I sat up together in the library, he making frequent visits to the sickroom, and returning with the information that the case was taking precisely the course he expected. Once he said to me, "Can you imagine any cause of ill-feeling this woman has against her mistress, who is so devoted to her?"

"I think there was some misunderstanding between them before her illness. Why do you ask?"

"Because I have observed for the last five or six hours—since, I fancy, she has lost all hope of recovery—there seems a strange prompting in her to say something which pain and failing strength forbid her to utter; and there is a look of hideous meaning in her eyes, which she turns continually towards her mistress. In this disease the mind often remains singularly clear to the last."

"I am not surprised at an indication of malevolent feeling in her," I said. "She is a woman who has always inspired me with distrust and dislike, but she managed to insinuate herself into her mistress's favour." He was silent after this, looking at the fire with an air of absorption, till he went upstairs again. He stayed away longer than usual, and on returning, said to me quietly, "Come now."

I followed him to the chamber where death was hovering. The dark hangings of the large bed made a background that gave a strong relief to Bertha's pale face as I entered. She started forward as she saw me enter, and then looked at Meunier with an expression of angry inquiry; but he lifted up his hand as if to impose silence, while he fixed his glance on the dying woman and felt her pulse. The face was pinched and ghastly, a cold perspiration was on the forehead, and the eyelids were lowered so as to conceal the large dark eyes. After a minute or two, Meunier walked round to the other side of the bed where Bertha stood, and with his usual air of gentle politeness towards her begged her to leave the patient under our care—everything should be done for her—she was no longer in a state to be conscious of an affectionate presence. Bertha was hesitating, apparently almost willing to believe his assurance and to comply. She looked round at the ghastly dying face, as if to read the confirmation of that assurance, when for a moment the lowered eyelids were raised again, and it seemed as if the eyes were looking towards Bertha, but blankly. A shudder passed through Bertha's frame, and she returned to her station near the pillow, tacitly implying that she would not leave the room.

The eyelids were lifted no more. Once I looked at Bertha as she watched the face of the dying one. She wore a rich *peignoir*, and her blond hair was half covered by a lace cap: in her attire she was, as always, an elegant woman, fit to figure in a picture of modern aristocratic life: but I asked myself how that face of hers could ever have seemed to me the face of a woman born of woman, with memories of childhood, capable of pain, needing to be fondled? The features at that moment seemed so preternaturally sharp, the eyes were so hard and eager—she looked like a cruel immortal, finding her spiritual feast in the agonies of a dying race. For across those hard features there came something like a flash when the last hour had been breathed out, and we all felt that the dark veil had completely fallen. What secret was there between Bertha and this woman? I turned my eyes from her with a horrible dread lest my insight should return, and I should be obliged to see what had been breeding about two unloving women's hearts. I felt that Bertha had been watching for the moment of death as the sealing of her secret: I thanked Heaven it could remain sealed for me.

Meunier said quietly, "She is gone." He then gave his arm to Bertha, and she submitted to be led out of the room.

I suppose it was at her order that two female attendants came into the room, and dismissed the younger one who had been present before. When they entered, Meunier had already opened the artery in the long thin neck that lay rigid on the pillow, and I dismissed them, ordering them to remain at a distance till we rang: the doctor, I said, had an operation to perform—he was not sure about the death. For the next twenty minutes I forgot everything but Meunier and the experiment in which he was so absorbed, that I think his senses would have been closed against all sounds or sights which had no relation to it. It was my task at first to keep up the artificial respiration in the body after the transfusion had been effected, but presently Meunier relieved me, and I could see the wondrous slow return of life; the breast began to heave, the inspirations became stronger, the eyelids quivered, and the soul seemed to have returned beneath them. The artificial respiration was withdrawn: still the breathing continued, and there was a movement of the lips.

Just then I heard the handle of the door moving: I suppose Bertha had heard from the women that they had been dismissed: probably a vague fear had arisen in her mind, for she entered with a look of alarm. She came to the foot of the bed and gave a stifled cry.

The dead woman's eyes were wide open, and met hers in full recognition—the recognition of hate. With a sudden strong effort, the hand that Bertha had thought for ever still was pointing towards her, and the haggard face moved. The gasping eager voice said:

"You mean to poison your husband . . . the poison is in the black cabinet . . . I got it for you . . . you laughed at me, and told lies about me behind my back, to make me disgusting . . . because you were jealous . . . are you sorry . . . now?"

The lips continued to murmur, but the sounds were no longer distinct. Soon there was no sound—only a slight movement: the flame had leaped out, and was being extinguished the faster. The wretched woman's heartstrings had been set to hatred and vengeance: the spirit of life had swept the chords for an instant, and was gone again for ever. Great God! Is this what it is to live again . . . to wake up with our unstilled thirst upon us, with our unuttered curses rising to our lips, with our muscles ready to act out their half-committed sins?

Bertha stood pale at the foot of the bed, quivering and helpless, despairing of devices, like a cunning animal whose hiding-places are surrounded by swift-advancing flame. Even Meunier looked paralysed;

life for that moment ceased to be a scientific problem to him. As for me, this scene seemed of one texture with the rest of my existence: horror was my familiar, and this new revelation was only like an old pain recurring with new circumstances.

. . . .

Since then Bertha and I have lived apart—she in her own neighbourhood, the mistress of half our wealth, I as a wanderer in foreign countries, until I came to this Devonshire nest to die. Bertha lives pitied and admired; for what had I against that charming woman, whom every one but myself could have been happy with? There had been no witness of the scene in the dying room except Meunier, and while Meunier lived his lips were sealed by a promise to me.

Once or twice, weary of wandering, I rested in a favourite spot, and my heart went out towards the men and women and children whose faces were becoming familiar to me; but I was driven away again in terror at the approach of my old insight—driven away to live continually with the one Unknown Presence revealed and yet hidden by the moving curtain of the earth and sky. Till at last disease took hold of me and forced me to rest here—forced me to live in dependence on my servants. And then the curse of insight—of my double consciousness, came again, and has never left me. I know all their narrow thoughts, their feeble regard, their half-wearied pity.

. . . .

It is the 20th of September, 1850. I know these figures I have just written, as if they were a long familiar inscription. I have seen them on this page in my desk unnumbered times, when the scene of my dying struggle has opened upon me. . . .

WILKIE COLLINS

(1824–1889)

WILLIAM WILKIE COLLINS was the eldest son of William Collins, R.A., receiving his second Christian name from his godfather, the painter, Sir David Wilkie. Apprenticed to the tea business, he deserted it for the study of law, and was called to the Bar in 1851. Law, however, had little attraction for him, and a meeting with Dickens revived an earlier inclination for the pen. His *flair* was for mystery novels, and his mastery of the art was unrivalled in his day, and is still much appreciated. His first novel was *Hide and Seek* (1854); and this was followed by a whole library of other works, of which the best are *The Dead Secret* (1857), *The Woman in White* (1860), and *The Moonstone* (1868).

"The Traveller's Story of a Terribly Strange Bed" is reprinted from *After Dark* (1856).

The Traveller's Story of

A TERRIBLY STRANGE BED

SHORTLY after my education at college was finished, I happened to be staying at Paris with an English friend. We were both young men then, and lived, I am afraid, rather a wild life, in the delightful city of our sojourn. One night we were idling about the neighbourhood of the Palais Royal, doubtful to what amusement we should next betake ourselves. My friend proposed a visit to Frascati's; but his suggestion was not to my taste. I knew Frascati's, as the French saying is, by heart; had lost and won plenty of five-franc pieces there, merely for amusement's sake, until it was amusement no longer, and was thoroughly tired, in fact, of all the ghastly respectabilities of such a social anomaly as a respectable gambling-house. "For Heaven's sake," said I to my friend, "let us go somewhere where we can see a little genuine, blackguard, poverty-stricken gaming, with no false gingerbread glitter thrown over it at all. Let us get away from fashionable Frascati's, to a house where they don't mind letting in a man with a ragged coat, or a man with no coat, ragged or otherwise."—"Very well," said my friend, "we needn't go out of the Palais Royal to find the sort of company you want. Here's the place just before us; as blackguard a place, by all report, as you could possibly wish to see." In another minute we arrived at the door, and entered the house.

When we got upstairs, and had left our hats and sticks with the doorkeeper, we were admitted into the chief gambling-room. We did not find many people assembled there. But, few as the men were who looked up at us on our entrance, they were all types—lamentably true types—of their respective classes.

We had come to see blackguards; but these men were something worse. There is a comic side, more or less appreciable, in all blackguardism—here there was nothing but tragedy—mute, weird tragedy. The quiet in the room was horrible. The thin, haggard, long-haired young man, whose sunken eyes fiercely watched the turning up of the cards, never spoke; the flabby, fat-faced, pimply player, who pricked his piece of pasteboard perseveringly, to register how often black won, and how often red—never spoke; the dirty, wrinkled old man, with the vulture eyes and the darned greatcoat, who had lost his last *sou*, and still looked on desperately, after he could play no longer—never spoke. Even the voice of the croupier sounded as if it were strangely dulled and thickened in the atmosphere of the room. I had entered the place to laugh, but the spectacle before me was something to weep over. I soon found it necessary to take refuge in excitement from the depression of spirits which was fast stealing on me. Unfortunately I sought the nearest excitement, by going to the table, and beginning to play. Still more unfortunately, as the event will show, I won—won prodigiously; won incredibly; won at such a rate, that the regular players at the table crowded round me; and staring at my stakes with hungry, superstitious eyes, whispered to one another, that the English stranger was going to break the bank.

The game was *Rouge et Noir*. I had played at it in every city in Europe, without, however, the care or the wish to study the Theory of Chances—that philosopher's stone of all gamblers! And a gambler, in the strict sense of the word, I had never been. I was heart-whole from the corroding passion for play. My gaming was a mere idle amusement. I never resorted to it by necessity, because I never knew what it was to want money. I never practised it so incessantly as to lose more than I could afford, or to gain more than I could coolly pocket without being thrown off my balance by my good luck. In short, I had hitherto frequented gambling-tables—just as I frequented ball-rooms and opera-houses—because they amused me, and because I had nothing better to do with my leisure hours.

But on this occasion it was very different—now, for the first time in my life, I felt what the passion for play really was. My success first bewildered, and then, in the most literal meaning of the word, intoxicated me. Incredible as it may appear, it is nevertheless true, that I only lost when I attempted to estimate chances, and played according to previous calculation. If I left everything to luck, and staked without any care or consideration, I was sure to win—to win in the face of every recognised probability in favour of the bank. At first, some of the men present ventured their money safely enough on my colour; but I speedily increased my stakes to sums which they dared not risk. One after another they left off playing, and breathlessly looked on at my game.

Still, time after time, I staked higher and higher, and still won. The excitement in the room rose to fever pitch. The silence was interrupted by a deep-muttered chorus of oaths and exclamations in different languages, every time the gold was shovelled across to my side of the table—even the imperturbable croupier dashed his rake on the floor in a (French) fury of astonishment at my success. But one man present preserved his self-possession; and that man was my friend. He came to my side, and whispering in English, begged me to leave the place, satisfied with what I had already gained. I must do him the justice to say that he repeated his warnings and entreaties several times, and only left me and went away, after I had rejected his advice (I was to all intents and purposes gambling-drunk) in terms which rendered it impossible for him to address me again that night.

Shortly after he had gone, a hoarse voice behind me cried: "Permit me, my dear sir!—permit me to restore to their proper place two Napoleons which you have dropped. Wonderful luck, sir! I pledge you my word of honour, as an old soldier, in the course of my long experience in this sort of thing, I never saw such luck as yours!—never! Go on, sir—*Sacré mille bombes!* Go on boldly, and break the bank!"

I turned round and saw, nodding and smiling at me with inveterate civility, a tall man, dressed in a frogged and braided surtout.

If I had been in my senses, I should have considered him, personally, as being rather a suspicious specimen of an old soldier. He had goggling bloodshot eyes, mangy moustachios, and a broken nose. His voice betrayed a barrack-room intonation of the worst order, and he had the dirtiest pair of hands I ever saw—even in France. These little personal peculiarities exercised, however, no repelling influence on me. In the mad excitement, the reckless triumph of that moment, I was ready to "fraternise" with anybody who encouraged me in my game. I accepted the old soldier's offered pinch of snuff; clapped him on the back, and swore he was the honestest fellow in the world—the most glorious relic of the Grand Army that I had ever met with. "Go on!" cried my military friend, snapping his fingers in ecstasy,—"Go on, and win! Break the bank—*Mille tonnerres!* my gallant English comrade, break the bank!"

And I *did* go on—went on at such a rate, that in another quarter of an hour the croupier called out: "Gentlemen! the bank has discontinued for to-night." All the notes, and all the gold in that "bank," now lay in a heap under my hands; the whole floating capital of the gambling-house was waiting to pour into my pockets!

"Tie up the money in your pocket-handkerchief, my worthy sir," said the old soldier, as I wildly plunged my hands into my heap of gold. "Tie it up, as we used to tie up a bit of dinner in the Grand Army; your winnings are too heavy for any breeches pockets that ever were sewed. There! that's it!—shovel them in, notes and all! *Credié!* what luck!—Stop! another Napoleon on the floor! *Ah! Sacré petit polisson de Napoleon!* have I found thee at last? Now then, sir—two tight double knots each way with your honourable permission, and the money's safe. Feel it! feel it, fortunate sir! hard and round as a cannon ball—*Ah, bah!* if they had only fired such cannon balls at us at Austerlitz—*nom d'une pipe!* if they only had! And now, as an ancient grenadier, as an ex-brave of the French army, what remains for me to do? I ask what? Simply this: to entreat my valued English friend to drink a bottle of champagne with me, and toast the goddess Fortune in foaming goblets before we part!"

Excellent ex-brave! Convivial ancient grenadier! Champagne by all means! An English cheer for an old soldier! Hurrah! hurrah! Another English cheer for the goddess Fortune! Hurrah! hurrah! hurrah!

"Bravo! the Englishman; the amiable, gracious Englishman, in whose veins circulates the vivacious blood of France! Another glass? *Ah, bah!*—the bottle is empty! Never mind! *Vive le vin!* I, the old soldier, order another bottle, and half-a-pound of *bon-bons* with it!"

"No, no, ex-brave; never—ancient grenadier! *Your* bottle last time; *my* bottle this. Behold it! Toast away! The French Army!—the great Napoleon!—the present company! the croupier! the honest croupier's wife and daughters—if he has any! the ladies generally! Everybody in the world!"

By the time the second bottle of champagne was emptied, I felt as if I had been drinking liquid fire—my brain seemed all aflame. No excess in wine had ever had this effect on me before in my life. Was it the result of a stimulant acting upon my system when I was in a highly excited state? Was my stomach in a particularly disordered condition? Or was the champagne amazingly strong?

"Ex-brave of the French Army!" cried I, in a mad state of exhilaration, "*I* am on fire! how are *you?* You have set me on fire! Do you hear, my hero of Austerlitz? Let us have a third bottle of champagne to put the flame out!"

The old soldier wagged his head, rolled his goggle eyes, until I expected to see them slip out of their sockets; placed his dirty forefinger by the side of his broken nose; solemnly ejaculated, "Coffee!" and immediately ran off into an inner room.

The word pronounced by the eccentric veteran seemed to have a magical effect on the rest of the company present. With one accord they all rose to depart. Probably they had expected to profit by my intoxication; but finding that my new friend was benevolently bent on preventing me from getting dead drunk, had now abandoned all hope of thriving pleasantly on my winnings. Whatever their motive might be, at any rate they went away in a body. When the old soldier returned, and sat down again opposite to me at the table, we had the room to ourselves. I could see the croupier, in a sort of vestibule which opened out of it, eating his supper in solitude. The silence was now deeper than ever.

A sudden change, too, had come over the "ex-brave." He assumed a portentously solemn look; and when he spoke to me again, his speech was ornamented by no oaths, enforced by no finger-snapping, enlivened by no apostrophes or exclamations.

"Listen, my dear sir," said he, in mysteriously confidential tones, "listen to an old soldier's advice. I have been to the mistress of the house (a very charming woman, with a genius for cookery!) to impress on her the necessity of making us some particularly strong and good coffee. You must drink this coffee in order to get rid of your little amiable exaltation of spirits before you think of going home—you *must*, my good and gracious friend! With all that money to take home to-night, it is a sacred duty to yourself to have your wits about you. You are known to be a winner to an enormous extent by several gentlemen present to-night, who, in a certain point of view, are very worthy and excellent fellows; but they are mortal men, my dear sir, and they have their amiable weaknesses! Need I say more? Ah, no, no! you understand me! Now, this is what you must do—send for a cabriolet when you feel quite well again—draw up all the windows when you get into it—and tell the driver to take you home only through the large and well-lighted thoroughfares. Do this; and you and your money will be safe. Do this; and to-morrow you will thank an old soldier for giving you a word of honest advice."

Just as the ex-brave ended his oration in very lachrymose tones, the coffee came in, ready poured out in two cups. My attentive friend handed me one of the cups with a bow. I was parched with thirst, and drank it off at a draught. Almost instantly afterwards, I was seized with a fit of giddiness, and felt more completely intoxicated than ever. The room whirled round and round furiously; the old soldier seemed to be regularly bobbing up and down before me like the piston of a steam-engine. I was half deafened by a violent singing in my ears; a feeling of utter bewilderment, helplessness, idiocy, overcame me. I rose from my chair, holding on by the table to keep my balance; and stammered out, that I felt dreadfully unwell—so unwell that I did not know how I was to get home.

"My dear friend," answered the old soldier—and even his voice seemed to be bobbing up and down as he spoke—"my dear friend, it would be madness to go home in *your* state; you would be sure to lose your money; you might be robbed and murdered with the greatest ease. *I* am going to sleep here: do *you* sleep here, too—they make up capital beds in this house—take one; sleep off the effects of the wine, and go home safely with your winnings to-morrow—to-morrow, in broad daylight."

I had but two ideas left: one, that I must never let go hold of my handkerchief full of money; the other, that I must lie down somewhere immediately, and fall off into a comfortable sleep. So I agreed to the proposal about the bed, and took the offered arm of the old soldier, carrying my money with my disengaged hand. Preceded by the croupier, we passed along some passages and up a flight of stairs into the bedroom which I was to occupy. The ex-brave shook me warmly by the hand, proposed that we should breakfast together, and then, followed by the croupier, left me for the night.

I ran to the wash-hand stand; drank some of the water in my jug; poured the rest out, and plunged my face into it; then sat down in a chair and tried to compose myself. I soon felt better. The change for my lungs, from the fetid atmosphere of the gambling-room to the cool air of the apartment I now occupied; the almost equally refreshing change for my eyes, from the glaring gas-lights of the "Salon" to the dim, quiet flicker of one bedroom candle, aided wonderfully the restorative effects of cold water. The giddiness left me, and I began to feel a little like a reasonable being again. My first thought was of the risk of sleeping all night in a gambling-house; my second, of the still greater risk of trying to get out after the house was closed, and of going home alone at night, through the streets of Paris, with a large sum of money about me. I had slept in worse places than this on my travels; so I determined to lock, bolt, and barricade my door, and take my chance till the next morning.

Accordingly, I secured myself against all intrusion; looked under the bed, and into the cupboard; tried the fastening of the window; and then, satisfied that I had taken every proper precaution, pulled off my upper clothing, put my light, which was a dim one, on the hearth among a feathery litter of wood ashes, and got into bed, with the handkerchief full of money under my pillow.

I soon felt not only that I could not go to sleep, but that I could not even close my eyes. I was wide awake, and in a high fever. Every nerve in my body trembled—every one of my senses seemed to be preternaturally sharpened. I tossed and rolled, and tried every kind of position, and perseveringly sought out the cold corners of the bed, and all to no purpose. Now, I thrust my arms over the clothes; now, I poked them under the clothes, now, I violently shot my legs straight out down to the bottom of the bed; now, I convulsively coiled them up as near my chin as they would go; now, I shook out my crumpled pillow, changed it to the cool side, patted it flat, and lay down quietly on my back; now, I fiercely doubled it in two, set it up on end, thrust it against the board of the bed, and tried a sitting posture. Every effort was in vain; I groaned with vexation, as I felt that I was in for a sleepless night.

What could I do? I had no book to read. And yet, unless I found out some method of diverting my mind, I felt certain that I was in the condition to imagine all sorts of horrors; to rack my brain with forebodings of every possible and impossible danger; in short, to pass the night in suffering all conceivable varieties of nervous terror.

I raised myself on my elbow, and looked about the room—which was brightened by a lovely moonlight pouring straight through the window—to see if it contained any pictures or ornaments that I could at all clearly distinguish. While my eyes wandered from wall to wall, a remembrance of Le Maistre's delightful little book, *Voyage autour de ma Chambre*, occurred to me. I resolved to imitate the French author, and find occupation and amusement enough to relieve the tedium of my wakefulness, by making a mental inventory of every article of furniture I could see, and by following up to their sources the multitude of associations which even a chair, a table, or a wash-hand stand may be made to call forth.

In the nervous unsettled state of my mind at that moment, I found it much easier to make my inventory than to make my reflections, and thereupon soon gave up all hope of thinking in Le Maistre's fanciful track—or, indeed, of thinking at all. I looked about the room at the different articles of furniture, and did nothing more.

There was, first, the bed I was lying in; a four-post bed, of all things in the world to meet with in Paris!—yes, a thorough clumsy British four-poster, with the regular top lined with chintz—the regular fringed valance all round—the regular stifling unwholesome curtains, which I remembered having mechanically drawn back against the posts without particularly noticing the bed when I first got into the room. Then there was the marble-topped wash-hand stand, from which the water I had spilt, in my hurry to pour it out, was still dripping, slowly and more slowly, on to the brick floor. Then two small chairs, with my coat, waistcoat, and trousers flung on them. Then a large elbow-chair covered with dirty-white dimity, with my cravat and shirt-collar thrown over the back. Then a chest of drawers with two of the brass handles off, and a tawdry, broken china inkstand placed on it by way of ornament for the top. Then the dressing-table, adorned by a very small looking-glass, and a very large pincushion. Then the window—an unusually large window. Then a dark old picture, which the feeble candle dimly showed me. It was the picture of a fellow in a high Spanish hat, crowned with a plume of towering feathers. A swarthy sinister ruffian, looking upward, shading his eyes with his hand, and looking intently upward—it might be at some tall gallows at which he was going to be hanged. At any rate, he had the appearance of thoroughly deserving it.

This picture put a kind of constraint upon me to look upward too—at the top of the bed. It was a gloomy and not an interesting object, and I looked back at the picture. I counted the feathers in the man's hat—they stood out in relief—three white, two green. I observed the crown of his hat, which was of a conical shape, according to the fashion supposed to have been favoured by Guido Fawkes. I wondered what he was looking up at. It couldn't be at the stars; such a desperado was neither astrologer nor astronomer. It must be at the high gallows, and he was going to be hanged presently. Would the executioner come into possession of his conical crowned hat and plume of feathers? I counted the feathers again—three white, two green.

While I still lingered over this very improving and intellectual employment, my thoughts insensibly began to wander. The moonlight shining into the room reminded me of a certain moonlight night in England—the night after a picnic party in a Welsh valley. Every incident of the drive homeward, through lovely scenery, which the moonlight made lovelier than ever, came back to my remembrance, though I had never given the picnic a thought for years; though, if I had *tried* to recollect it, I could certainly have recalled little or nothing of that scene long past. Of all the wonderful faculties that help to tell us we are immortal, which speaks the sublime truth more eloquently than memory? Here was I, in a strange house of the most suspicious character, in a situation of uncertainty, and even of peril, which might seem to make the cool exercise of my recollection almost out of the question; nevertheless, remembering, quite involuntarily, places, people, conversations, minute circumstances of every kind, which I had thought forgotten for ever; which I could not possibly have recalled at will, even under the most favourable auspices. And what cause had produced in a moment the whole of this strange, complicated, mysterious effect? Nothing but some rays of moonlight shining in at my bedroom window.

I was still thinking of the picnic—of our merriment on the drive home—of the sentimental young lady who *would* quote Childe Harold because it was moonlight. I was absorbed by these past scenes and past amusements, when, in an instant, the thread on which my memories hung snapped asunder: my attention immediately came back to present things more vividly than ever, and I found myself, I neither knew why nor wherefore, looking hard at the picture again.

Looking for what?

Good God! the man had pulled his hat down on his brows!—No! the hat itself was gone! Where was the conical crown? Where the feathers—three white, two green? Not there! In place of the hat and feathers, what dusky object was it that now hid his forehead, his eyes, his shading hand?

Was the bed moving?

I turned on my back and looked up. Was I mad? drunk? dreaming? giddy again? or was the top of the bed really moving down—sinking slowly, regularly, silently, horribly, right down throughout the whole of its length and breadth—right down upon me, as I lay underneath?

My blood seemed to stand still. A deadly paralysing coldness stole all over me, as I turned my head round on the pillow, and determined to test whether the bed-top was really moving or not, by keeping my eye on the man in the picture.

The next look in that direction was enough. The dull black, frowsy outline of the valance above me was within an inch of being parallel with his waist. I still looked breathlessly. And steadily, and slowly—very slowly—I saw the figure, and the line of frame below the figure, vanish, as the valance moved down before it.

I am, constitutionally, anything but timid. I have been on more than one occasion in peril of my life, and have not lost my self-possession for an instant; but when the conviction first settled on my mind that the bed-top was really moving, was steadily and continuously sinking down upon me, I looked up shuddering, helpless, panic-stricken, beneath the hideous machinery for murder, which was advancing closer and closer to suffocate me where I lay.

I looked up, motionless, speechless, breathless. The candle, fully spent, went out; but the moonlight still brightened the room. Down and down, without pausing and without sounding, came the bed-top, and still my panic-terror seemed to bind me faster and faster to the mattress on which I lay—down and down it sank, till the dusty odour from the lining of the canopy came stealing into my nostrils.

At that final moment the instinct of self-preservation startled me out of my trance, and I moved at last. There was just room for me to roll myself sideways off the bed. As I dropped noiselessly to the floor, the edge of the murderous canopy touched me on the shoulder.

Without stopping to draw my breath, without wiping the cold sweat from my face, I rose instantly on my knees to watch the bed-top. I was literally spell-bound by it. If I had heard footsteps behind me, I could not have turned round; if a means of escape had been miraculously provided for me, I could not have moved to take advantage of it. The whole life in me was, at that moment, concentrated in my eyes.

It descended—the whole canopy, with the fringe round it, came down—down—close down; so close that there was not room now to squeeze my finger between the bed-top and the bed. I felt at the sides, and discovered that what had appeared to me from beneath to be the ordinary light canopy of a four-post bed, was in reality a thick, broad mattress, the substance of which was concealed by the valance and its fringe. I looked up and saw the four posts rising hideously bare. In the middle of the bed-top was a huge wooden screw that had evidently worked it down through a hole in the ceiling, just as ordinary presses are worked down on the substance selected for compression. The frightful apparatus moved without making the faintest noise. There had been no creaking as it came down; there was now not the faintest sound from the room above. Amid a dead and awful silence

I beheld before me—in the nineteenth century, and in the civilised capital of France—such a machine for secret murder by suffocation as might have existed in the worst days of the Inquisition, in the lonely inns among the Hartz Mountains, in the mysterious tribunals of Westphalia! Still, as I looked on it, I could not move, I could hardly breathe, but I began to recover the power of thinking, and in a moment I discovered the murderous conspiracy framed against me in all its horror.

My cup of coffee had been drugged, and drugged too strongly. I had been saved from being smothered by having taken an overdose of some narcotic. How I had chafed and fretted at the fever-fit which had preserved my life by keeping me awake! How recklessly I had confided myself to the two wretches who had led me into this room, determined, for the sake of my winnings, to kill me in my sleep by the surest and most horrible contrivance for secretly accomplishing my destruction! How many men, winners like me, had slept, as I had proposed to sleep, in that bed, and had never been seen or heard of more! I shuddered at the bare idea of it.

But, ere long, all thought was again suspended by the sight of the murderous canopy moving once more. After it had remained on the bed—as nearly as I could guess—about ten minutes, it began to move up again. The villains who worked it from above evidently believed that their purpose was now accomplished. Slowly and silently, as it had descended, that horrible bed-top rose towards its former place. When it reached the upper extremities of the four posts, it reached the ceiling too. Neither hole nor screw could be seen; the bed became in appearance an ordinary bed again—the canopy an ordinary canopy—even to the most suspicious eyes.

Now, for the first time, I was able to move—to rise from my knees—to dress myself in my upper clothing—and to consider of how I should escape. If I betrayed, by the smallest noise, that the attempt to suffocate me had failed, I was certain to be murdered. Had I made any noise already? I listened intently, looking towards the door.

No! no footsteps in the passage outside—no sound of a tread, light or heavy, in the room above—absolute silence everywhere. Besides locking and bolting my door, I had moved an old wooden chest against it, which I had found under the bed. To remove this chest (my blood ran cold as I thought of what its contents *might* be!) without making some disturbance was impossible; and, moreover, to think of escaping through the house, now barred up for the night, was sheer insanity. Only one chance was left me—the window. I stole to it on tiptoe.

My bedroom was on the first floor, above an *entresol*, and looked into the back street. I raised my hand to open the window, knowing that on that action hung, by the merest hair's-breadth, my chance of safety. They keep vigilant watch in the House of Murder. If any part of the frame cracked, if the hinge creaked, I was a lost man! It must have occupied me at least five minutes, reckoning by time—five *hours*, reckoning by suspense—to open that window. I succeeded in doing it silently—in doing it with all the dexterity of a housebreaker—and then looked down into the street. To leap the distance beneath me would be almost certain destruction! Next, I looked round at the sides of the house. Down the left side ran a thick water-pipe—it passed close by the outer edge of the window. The moment I saw the pipe, I knew I was saved. My breath came and went freely for the first time since I had seen the canopy of the bed moving down upon me!

To some men the means of escape which I had discovered might have seemed difficult and dangerous enough—to *me* the prospect of slipping down the pipe into the street did not suggest even a thought of peril. I had always been accustomed, by the practice of gymnastics, to keep up my schoolboy powers as a daring and expert climber; and knew that my head, hands, and feet would serve me faithfully in any hazards of ascent or descent. I had already got one leg over the window-sill, when I remembered the handkerchief filled with money under my pillow. I could well have afforded to leave it behind me, but I was revengefully determined that the miscreants of the gambling-house should miss their plunder as well as their victim. So I went back to the bed and tied the heavy handkerchief at my back by my cravat.

Just as I had made it tight and fixed it in a comfortable place, I thought I heard a sound of breathing outside the door. The chill feeling of horror ran through me again as I listened. No! dead silence still in the passage—I had only heard the night-air blowing softly into the room. The next moment I was on the window-sill—and the next I had a firm grip on the water-pipe with my hands and knees.

I slid down into the street easily and quietly, as I thought I should, and immediately set off at the top of my speed to a branch "Prefecture" of Police, which I knew was situated in the immediate neighbourhood. A "Sub-prefect," and several picked men among his subordinates, happened to be up, maturing, I believe, some scheme for discovering the perpetrator of a mysterious murder which all Paris was talking of just then. When I began my story, in a breathless hurry and in very bad French, I could see that the Sub-prefect suspected me of being a drunken Englishman who had robbed somebody; but he soon altered his opinion as I went on, and before I had anything like concluded, he shoved all the papers before him into a drawer, put on his hat, supplied me with another (for I was bare-headed), ordered a file of soldiers, desired his expert followers to get ready all sorts of tools for breaking open doors and ripping up brick-flooring, and took my arm, in the most friendly and familiar manner possible, to lead me with him out of the house. I will venture to say, that when the Sub-prefect was a little boy, and was taken for the first time to the play, he was not half as much pleased as he was now at the job in prospect for him at the gambling house!

Away we went through the streets, the Sub-prefect cross-examining and congratulating me in the same breath as we marched at the head of our formidable *posse comitatus*. Sentinels were placed at the back and front of the house the moment we got to it; a tremendous battery of knocks was directed against the door; a light appeared at a window; I was told to conceal myself behind the police—then came more knocks, and a cry of "Open in the name of the law!" At that terrible summons bolts and locks gave way before an invisible hand, and the moment after the Sub-prefect was in the passage, confronting a waiter half-dressed and ghastly pale. This was the short dialogue which immediately took place:

"We want to see the Englishman who is sleeping in this house?"

"He went away hours ago."

"He did no such thing. His friend went away; *he* remained. Show us to his bedroom!"

"I swear to you, Monsieur le Sous-prefect, he is not here! he——"

"I swear to you, Monsieur le Garçon, he is. He slept here—he didn't find your bed comfortable—he came to us to complain of it—here he is among my men—and here am I ready to look for a flea or two in his bedstead. Renaudin! (calling to one of the subordinates, and pointing to the waiter) collar that man, and tie his hands behind him. Now, then, gentlemen, let us walk upstairs!"

Every man and woman in the house was secured—the "Old Soldier" the first. Then I identified the bed in which I had slept, and then we went into the room above.

No object that was at all extraordinary appeared in any part of it. The Sub-prefect looked round the place, commanded everybody to be silent, stamped twice on the floor, called for a candle, looked attentively at the spot he had stamped on, and ordered the flooring there to be carefully taken up. This was done in no time. Lights were produced, and we saw a deep raftered cavity between the floor of this room and the ceiling of the room beneath. Through this cavity there ran perpendicularly a sort of case of iron thickly greased; and inside the case appeared the screw, which communicated with the bed-top below. Extra lengths of screw, freshly oiled; levers covered with felt; all the complete upper works of a heavy press—constructed with infernal ingenuity so as to join the fixtures below, and when taken to pieces again to go into the smallest possible compass—were next discovered and pulled out on the floor. After some little difficulty the

Sub-prefect succeeded in putting the machinery together, and, leaving his men to work it, descended with me to the bedroom. The smothering canopy was then lowered, but not so noiselessly as I had seen it lowered. When I mentioned this to the Sub-prefect, his answer, simple as it was, had a terrible significance. "My men," said he, "are working down the bed-top for the first time—the men whose money you won were in better practice."

We left the house in the sole possession of two police agents—every one of the inmates being removed to prison on the spot. The Sub-prefect, after taking down my "*procès-verbal*" in his office, returned with me to my hotel to get my passport. "Do you think," I asked, as I gave it to him, "that any men have really been smothered in that bed, as they tried to smother *me?*"

"I have seen dozens of drowned men laid out at the Morgue," answered the Sub-prefect, "in whose pocket-books were found letters, stating that they had committed suicide in the Seine, because they had lost everything at the gaming-table. Do I know how many of those men entered the same gambling-house that *you* entered? won as *you* won? took that bed as *you* took it? slept in it? were smothered in it? and were privately thrown into the river, with a letter of explanation written by the murderers and placed in their pocket-books? No man can say how many or how few have suffered the fate from which you have escaped. The people of the gambling-house kept their bedstead machinery a secret from *us*—even from the police! The dead kept the rest of the secret for them. Good night, or rather good morning, Monsieur Faulkner! Be at my office again at nine o'clock—in the meantime, *au revoir!*"

The rest of my story is soon told. I was examined and re-examined; the gambling-house was strictly searched all through from top to bottom; the prisoners were separately interrogated; and two of the less guilty among them made a confession. *I* discovered that the Old Soldier was the master of the gambling-house—*justice* discovered that he had been drummed out of the army as a vagabond years ago; that he had been guilty of all sorts of villainies since; that he was in possession of stolen property, which the owners identified; and that he, the croupier, another accomplice, and the woman who had made my cup of coffee, were all in the secret of the bedstead. There appeared some reason to doubt whether the inferior persons attached to the house knew anything of the suffocating machinery; and they received the benefit of that doubt, by being treated simply as thieves and vagabonds. As for the Old Soldier and his two head-myrmidons, they went to the galleys; the woman who had drugged my coffee was imprisoned for I forget how many years; the regular attendants at the gambling-house were considered "suspicious," and placed under "surveillance"; and I became, for one whole week (which is a long time), the head "lion" in Parisian society. My adventure was dramatised by three illustrious playmakers, but never saw theatrical daylight; for the censorship forbade the introduction on the stage of a correct copy of the gambling-house bedstead.

One good result was produced by my adventure, which any censorship must have approved—it cured me of ever again trying *Rouge et Noir* as an amusement. The sight of a green cloth, with packs of cards and heaps of money on it, will henceforth be for ever associated in my mind with the sight of a bed-canopy descending to suffocate me in the silence and darkness of the night.

"OUIDA"

(1839–1908)

"OUIDA" (the pseudonym of Louise de la Ramée) was born in England, the child of a French father and an English mother. She began her literary career in 1859 with a story in *The New Monthly Magazine*, then edited by Harrison Ainsworth, and she followed this with many other contributions. Like her later novels, they dealt with dubious phases of military and fashionable life. Her first long story was *Held in Bondage* (1863), and this established her popularity. This was followed, among others, by *Strathmore* (1865), *Under Two Flags* (1868), *Tricotrin* (1869), and *Moths* (1880). In all she wrote more than forty works of fiction.

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CECIL CASTLEMAINE'S GAGE,

OR, THE STORY OF A BROIDERED SHIELD

CECIL CASTLEMAINE was the beauty of her county and her line, the handsomest of all the handsome women that had graced her race, when she moved a century and a half ago down the stately staircase and through the gilded and tapestried halls of Lilliesford. The Town had run mad after her, and her face levelled politics, and was cited as admiringly by the Whigs at St. James's as by the Tories at the Cocoa-tree, by the beaux and Mohocks at Garraway's as by the alumni at the Grecian, by the wits at Will's as by the fops at Ozinda's.

Wherever she went, whether to the Haymarket or the Opera, to the 'Change for a fan or the palace for a state ball, to Drury Lane to see Pastoral Philips's dreary dilution of Racine, or to some fair chief of her faction for basset and ombre, she was surrounded by the best men of her time, and hated by Whig beauties with virulent wrath, for she was a Tory to the backbone, indeed a Jacobite at heart; worshipped Bolingbroke, detested Marlborough and Eugene, believed in all the horrors of the programme said to have been plotted by the Whigs for the anniversary show of 1711, and was thought to have prompted the satire on those fair politicians who are disguised as *Rosalinda* and *Nigranilla* in the 81st paper of the *Spectator*.

Cecil Castlemaine was the greatest beauty of her day, lovelier still at four-and-twenty than she had been at seventeen, unwedded, though the highest coronets in the land had been offered to her; far above the coquetries and minauderies of her friends, far above the imitation of the affectations of "Lady Betty Modley's skuttle," or need of practising the Fan exercise; haughty, peerless, radiant, unwon—nay, more—untouched; for the finest gentleman on the town could not flatter himself that he had ever stirred the slightest trace of interest in her, nor boast, as he stood in the inner circle at the Chocolate-house (unless, indeed, he lied more impudently than Tom Wharton himself), that he had ever been honoured by a glance of encouragement from the Earl's daughter. She was too proud to cheapen herself with coquetry, too fastidious to care for her conquests over those who whispered to her through Nicolini's song, vied to have the privilege of carrying her fan, drove past her windows in Soho-square, crowded about her in St. James's Park, paid court even to her little spaniel Indamara, and, to catch but a glimpse of her brocaded train as it swept a ball-room floor, would leave even their play at the Groom Porter's, Mrs. Oldfield in the green-room, a night hunt with Mohun and their brother Mohocks, a circle of wits gathered "within the steam of the coffee-pot" at Will's, a dinner at Halifax's, a supper at Bolingbroke's—whatever, according to their several tastes, made their best entertainment and was hardest to quit.

The highest suitors of the day sought her smile and sued for her hand; men left the Court and the Mall to join the Flanders army before the lines at Bouchain less for loyal love of England than hopeless love of Cecil Castlemaine. Her father vainly urged her not to fling away offers that all the women at St. James's envied her. She was untouched and unwon, and when her friends, the court beauties, the fine ladies, the coquettes of quality, rallied her on her coldness (envying her her conquests), she would smile her slight proud smile and bow her stately head. "Perhaps she was cold; she might be; they were personable men? Oh, yes! she had nothing to say against them. His Grace of Belamour?—A pretty wit, without doubt. Lord Millamont?—diverting, but a coxcomb. He had beautiful hands; it was a pity he was always thinking of them! Sir Gage Rivers?—As obsequious a lover as the man in the *Way of the World*, but she had heard he was very boastful and facetious at women over his chocolate at Ozinda's. The Earl of Argent?—A gallant soldier, surely, but whatever he might protest, no mistress would ever rival with him the dice at the Groom Porter's. Lord Philip Bellairs?—A proper gentleman; no fault in him; a *bel esprit* and an elegant courtier; pleased many, no doubt, but he did not please her over much. Perhaps her taste was too finical, or her character too cold, as they said. She preferred it should be so. When you were content it were folly to seek a change. For her part, she failed to comprehend how women could stoop to flutter their fans and choose their ribbons, and rack their tirewomen's brains for new pulvillios, and lappets, and devices, and practise their curtsy and recovery before their pier-glass, for no better aim or stake than to draw the glance and win the praise of men for whom they cared nothing. A woman who had the eloquence of beauty and a true pride should be above heed for such affectations, pleasure in such applause!"

So she would put them all aside and turn the tables on her friends, and go on her own way, proud, peerless, Cecil Castlemaine, conquering and unconquered; and Steele must have had her name in his thoughts, and honoured it heartily and sincerely, when he wrote one Tuesday, on the 21st of October, under the domino of his Church Coquette, "I say I do honour to those who *can be coquettes and are not such*, but I despise all who would be so, and, in despair of arriving at it themselves, hate and vilify all those who can." A definition justly drawn by his keen, quick graver, though doubtless it only excited the ire of, and was entirely lost upon, those who read the paper over their dish of bohea, or over their toilette, while they shifted a patch for an hour before they could determine it, or regretted the loss of ten guineas at crimp.

Cecil Castlemaine was the beauty of the Town; when she sat at Drury Lane on the Tory side of the house, the devoutest admirer of Oldfield or Mrs. Porter scarcely heard a word of the *Heroic Daughter* or the *Amorous Widow*, and the "beau fullest of his own dear self" forgot his silver-fringed gloves, his medallion snuff-box, his knotted cravat, his clouded cane, the slaughter that he planned to do, from gazing at her where she sat, as though she were reigning sovereign at St. James's, the Castlemaine diamonds flashing crescent-like above her brow. At church and court, at park and assembly, there were none who could eclipse that haughty gentlewoman; therefore her fond women friends, who had caressed her so warmly and so gracefully, and pulled her to pieces behind her back, if they could, so eagerly over their dainty cups of tea in an afternoon visit, were glad, one and all, when on "Barnaby-bright," *anglice*, the 22nd (then the 11th) of June, the great Castlemaine chariot, with its three herons blazoned on its coroneted panels, its laced liveries and gilded harness, rolled over the heavy, ill-made roads down into the country in almost princely pomp, the peasants pouring out from the wayside cottages to stare at my lord's coach.

It was said in the town that a portly divine, who wore his scarf as one of the chaplains to the Earl of Castlemaine, had prattled somewhat indiscreetly at Child's of his patron's politics; that certain cypher letters had passed the Channel enclosed in chocolate cakes as soon as French goods were again imported after the peace of Utrecht; that gentlemen in high places were strongly suspected of mischievous designs against the tranquillity of the country and government; that the Earl had, among others, received a friendly hint from a relative in power to absent himself for a while from the Court where he was not best trusted, and the town where an incautious word might be picked up and lead to Tower-hill, and amuse himself at his goodly castle of Lilliesford, where the red deer would not spy upon him, and the dark beech-woods would tell no tales. And the ladies of quality, her dear friends and sisters, were glad when they heard it as they punted at basset and fluttered their fans complacently. They would have the field for themselves, for a season, while Cecil Castlemaine was immured in her manor of Lilliesford; would be free of her beauty to eclipse them at the next birthday, be quit of their most dreaded rival, their most omnipotent leader of fashion: and they rejoiced at the whisper of the cypher letter, the damaging gossipry of the Whig coffee-houses, the bad repute into which my Lord Earl had grown at St. James's, at the misfortune of their friend, in a word, as human nature, masculine or feminine, will ever do—to its shame be it spoken—unless the *fomes peccati* be more completely wrung out of it than it has ever been since the aged Gabriel performed that work of purification on the infant Mahomet.

It was the June of the year '15, and the coming disaffection was seething and boiling secretly among the Tories; the impeachment of Ormond and Bolingbroke had strengthened the distaste to the new-come Hanoverian pack, their attainder had been the blast of air needed to excite the smouldering wood to flame, the gentlemen of that party in the South began to grow impatient of the intrusion of the distant German branch, to think lovingly of the old legitimate line, and to feel something of the chafing irritation of the gentlemen of the North, who were fretting like staghounds held in leash.

Envoys passed to and fro between St. Germain, and Jacobite nobles, priests of the church that had fallen out of favour and were typified as the Scarlet Woman by a rival who, though successful, was still bitter, plotted with ecclesiastical relish in the task; letters were conveyed in rolls of innocent lace, plans were forwarded in frosted confections, messages were passed in invisible cypher that defied investigation. The times were dangerous; full of plot and counter-plot, of risk and danger, of fomenting projects and hidden disaffection—times in which men, living habitually over mines, learned to like the uncertainty, and to think life flavourless without the chance of losing it any hour; and things being in this state, the Earl of Castlemaine deemed it prudent to take the counsel of his friend in power, and retire from London for a while, perhaps for the safety of his person, perhaps for the advancement of his cause, either of which were easier ensured at his seat in the western counties than amidst the Whigs of the capital.

The castle of Lilliesford was bowered in the thick woods of the western counties, a giant pile built by Norman masons. Troops of deer herded under the gold-green beechen-boughs, the sunlight glistened through the aisles of the trees, and quivered down on to the thick moss, and ferns, and tangled grass that grew under the park woodlands; the water-lilies clustered on the river, and the swans "floated double, swan and shadow," under the leaves that swept into the water; then, when Cecil Castlemaine came down to share her father's retirement, as now, when her name and titles on the gold plate of a coffin lies with others of her race in the mausoleum across the park, where winter snows and summer sun-rays are alike to those who sleep within, is all that tells at Lilliesford of the loveliest woman of her time who once reigned there as mistress.

The country was in its glad green midsummer beauty, and the musk-rosebuds bloomed in profuse luxuriance over the chill marble of the terraces, and scattered their delicate odorous petals in fragrant showers on the sward of the lawns when Cecil Castlemaine came down to what she termed her exile. The morning was fair and cloudless; its sunbeams piercing through the darkest glades in the woodlands, the thickest shroud of the ivy, the deepest-hued pane of the mullioned windows, as she passed down the great staircase where lords and gentlewomen of her race gazed on her from the canvas of Lely and Jamesone, Bourdain and Vandyke, crossed the hall with her dainty step, so stately yet so light, and standing by the window of her own bower-room, was lured out on to the terrace overlooking the west side of the park.

She made such a picture as Vandyke would have liked to paint, with her golden glow upon her, and the musk-roses clustering about her round the pilasters of marble—the white chill marble to which Belamour and many other of her lovers of the court and town had often likened her. Vandyke would have lingered lovingly on the hand that rested on her staghound's head, would have caught her air of court-like grace and dignity, would have painted with delighted fidelity her deep azure eyes, her proud brow, her delicate lips arched haughtily like a Cupid's bow, would have picked out every fold of her sweeping train, every play of light on her silken skirts, every dainty tracery of her point-lace. Yet even painted by Sir Anthony, that perfect master of art and of elegance, though more finished it could have hardly been more faithful, more instinct with grace, and life, and dignity, than a sketch drawn of her shortly after that time by one who loved her well, which is still hanging in the gallery at Lilliesford, lighted up by the afternoon sun when it streams in through the western windows.

Cecil Castlemaine stood on the terrace looking over the lawns and gardens through the opening vistas of meeting boughs and interlaced leaves to the woods and hills beyond, fused in a soft mist of green and purple, with her hand lying carelessly on her hound's broad head. She was a zealous Tory, a skilled politician, and her thoughts were busy with the hopes and fears, the chances for and against, of a cause that lay near her heart, but whose plans were yet immature, whose first blow was yet unstruck, and whose well-wishers were sanguine of a success they had not yet hazarded, though they hardly ventured to whisper to each other their previous designs and desires. Her thoughts were far away, and she hardly heeded the beauty round her, musing on schemes and projects dear to her party, that would imperil the Castlemaine coronet, but would serve the only royal house the Castlemaine line had ever in their hearts acknowledged.

She had regretted leaving the Town, moreover; a leader of the mode, a wit, a woman of the world, she missed her accustomed sphere; she was no pastoral Phyllis, no country-born Mistress Fiddy, to pass her time in provincial pleasures, in making cordial waters, in tending her beau-pots, in preserving her fallen rose-leaves, and inspecting the confections in the still-room; as little was she able, like many fine ladies when in similar exile, to while it away by scolding her tirewoman, and sorting a suit of ribbons, in ordering a set of gilded leather hangings from Chelsea for the state chambers, and yawning over chocolate in her bed till mid-day. She regretted leaving the Town, not for Belamour, nor Argent, nor any of those who vainly hoped, as they glanced at the little mirror in the lids of their snuff-boxes that they might have graven themselves, were it ever so faintly, in her thoughts; but for the wits, the pleasures, the choice clique, the accustomed circle to which she was so used, the courtly, brilliant town-life where she was wont to reign.

So she stood on the terrace the first morning of her exile, her thoughts far away, with the loyal gentlemen of the North, and the banished court of St. Germain, the lids dropping proudly over her haughty eyes, and her lips half parted with a faint smile of triumph in the visions limned by ambition and imagination, while the wind softly stirred the rich lace of her bodice, and her fingers lay, lightly yet firmly, on the head of her staghound. She looked up at last as she heard the ring of a horse's hoofs, and saw a sorrel, covered with dust and foam, spurred up the avenue, which, rounding past the terrace, swept on to the front entrance; the sorrel looked well-nigh spent, and his rider somewhat worn and languid, as a man might do with justice who had been in boot and saddle twenty-four hours at the stretch, scarce stopping for a stoup of wine; but he lifted his hat, and bowed down to his saddle bow as he passed her.

"Was it the long-looked-for messenger with definite news from St. Germain?" wondered Lady Cecil, as her hound gave out a deep-tongued bay of anger at the stranger. She went back into her bower-room, and toyed absently with her flowered handkerchief, broidering a stalk to a violet-leaf, and wondering what additional hope the horseman might have brought to strengthen the good Cause, till her servants brought word that his Lordship prayed the pleasure of her presence in the octagon-room. Whereat she rose, and swept through the long corridors, entered the octagon-room, the sunbeams gathering about her rich dress as they passed through the stained glass oriels, and saluted the new-comer, when her father presented him to her as their trusty and welcome friend and envoy, Sir Fulke Ravensworth, with her careless dignity, and queenly grace, that nameless air which was too highly bred to be condescension, but markedly and proudly repelled familiarity, and signed a pale of distance beyond which none must intrude.

The new-comer was a tall and handsome man, of noble presence, bronzed by foreign suns, pale and jaded just now with hard riding, while his dark silver-laced suit was splashed and covered with dust; but as he bowed low to her, critical Cecil Castlemaine saw that not Belamour himself could have better grace, not my Lord Millamont courtlier mien nor whiter hands, and listened with gracious air to what her father unfolded to her of his mission from St. Germain, whither he had come, at great personal risk, in many disguises, and at breathless speed, to place in their hands a precious letter in cypher from James Stuart to his well-beloved and loyal subject Herbert George, Earl of Castlemaine. A letter spoken of with closed doors and in low whispers, loyal as was the household, supreme as the Earl reigned over his domains of Lilliesford, for these were times when men mistrusted those of their own blood, and when the very figures on the tapestry seemed instinct with life to spy and to betray—or when they almost feared the silk that tied a missive should babble of its contents, and the hound that slept beside them should read and tell their thoughts.

To leave Lilliesford would be danger to the Envoy and danger to the Cause; to stay as guest was to disarm suspicion. The messenger who had brought such priceless news must rest within the shelter of his roof; too much were risked by returning to the French coast yet awhile, or even by joining Mar or Derwentwater, so the Earl enforced his will upon the Envoy, and the Envoy thanked him, and accepted.

Perchance the beauty, whose eyes he had seen lighten and proud brow flush as she read the royal greeting and injunction, made a sojourn near her presence not distasteful; perchance he cared little where he stayed till the dawning time of action and of rising should arrive, when he should take the field and fight till life or death for the "White Rose and the long heads of hair." He was a soldier of fortune, a poor gentleman with no patrimony but his name, no chance of distinction save by his sword; sworn to a cause whose star was set for ever; for many years his life had been of changing adventure and shifting chances, now fighting with Berwick at Almanza, now risking his life in some delicate and dangerous errand for James Stuart that could not have been trusted so well to any other officer about St. Germain; gallant to rashness, yet with much of the acumen of the diplomatist, he was invaluable to his Court and Cause, but, Stuart-like, men-like, they hastened to employ, but ever forgot to reward!

Lady Cecil missed her town life, and did not over-favour her exile in the western counties. To note down on her Mather's tablets the drowsy homilies droned out by the chaplain on a Sabbath noon, to play at crambo, to talk with her tirewoman of new washes for the skin, to pass her hours away in knotting?—she, whom Steele might have writ of when he drew his character of *Eudoxia*, could while her exile with none of these inanities; neither could she consort with gentry who seemed to her little better than the boors of a country wake, who had never heard of Mr. Spectator and knew nothing of Mr. Cowley, countrywomen whose ambition was in their cowslip wines, fox-hunters more ignorant and uncouth than the dumb brutes they followed.

Who was there for miles around with whom she could stoop to associate, with whom she cared to exchange a word? Madam from the vicarage, in her grogram, learned in syrups, salves, and possets? Country Lady Bountifuls, with gossip of the village and the poultry-yard? Provincial Peeresses, who had never been to London since Queen Anne's coronation? A squirearchy, who knew of no music save the concert of their stop-hounds, no court save the court of the county assize, no literature unless by miracle 'twere Tarleton's Jests? None such as these could cross the inlaid oak parquet of Lilliesford, and be ushered into the presence of Cecil Castlemaine.

So the presence of the Chevalier's messenger was not altogether unwelcome and distasteful to her. She saw him but little, merely conversing at table with him with that distant and dignified courtesy which marked her out from the light, free, inconsequent manners in vogue with other women of quality of her time; the air which had chilled half the softest things even on Belamour's lips, and kept the vainest coxcomb hesitating and abashed.

But by degrees she observed that the Envoy was a man who had lived in many countries and in many courts, was well versed in the tongues of France and Italy and Spain—in their belles-lettres too, moreover—and had served his apprenticeship to good company in the salons of Versailles, in the audience-room of the Vatican, at the receptions of the Duchess du Maine, and with the banished family at St. Germain. He spoke with a high and sanguine spirit of the troublous times approaching and the beloved Cause whose crisis was at hand, which chimed in with her humour better than the flippancies of Belamour, the airy nothings of Millamont. He was but a soldier of fortune, a poor gentleman who, named to her in the town, would have had never a word, and would have been unnoted amidst the crowding beaux who clustered round to hold her fan and hear how she had been pleasured with the drolleries of *Grief à la Mode*. But down in the western counties she deigned to listen to the Prince's officer, to smile—a smile beautiful when it came on her proud lips, as the play of light on the opals of her jewelled stomacher—nay, even to be amused when he spoke of the women of foreign courts, to be interested when he told, which was but reluctantly, of his own perils, escapes, and adventures, to discourse with him, riding home under the beech avenues from hawking, or standing on the western terrace at curfew to watch the sunset, of many things on which the nobles of the Mall and the gentlemen about St. James's had never been allowed to share her opinions. For Lady Cecil was deeply read (unusually deeply for her day, since fine ladies of her rank and fashion mostly contented themselves with skimming a romance of Scudéry's, or an act of *Aurungzebe*); but she rarely spoke of those things, save perchance now and then to Mr. Addison, who, though a Whig, was certainly an elegant scholar.

Fulke Ravensworth never flattered her, moreover, and flattery was a honeyed confection of which she had long been cloyed; he even praised boldly before her other women of beauty and grace whom he had seen at Versailles, at Sceaux, and at St. Germain; neither did he defer to her perpetually, but where he differed would combat her sentiments courteously but firmly. Though a soldier and a man of action, he had an admirable skill at the limner's art; could read to her the *Divina Commedia*, or the comedies of Lope da' Vega, and transfer crabbed Latin and abstruse Greek into elegant English for her pleasure; and though a beggared gentleman of most precarious fortunes, he would speak of life and its chances, of the Cause and its perils, with a daring which she found preferable to the lisped languor of the men of the town, who had no better campaigns than laying siege to a prude, cared for no other weapons than their toilettes and snuff-boxes, and sought no other excitement than a *coup d'éclat* with the lion-tumblers.

On the whole, through these long midsummer days, Lady Cecil found the Envoy from St. Germain a companion that did not suit her ill, sought less the solitude of her bower-room, and listened graciously to him in the long twilight hours, while the evening dew gathered in the cups of the musk-roses, and the star-rays began to quiver on the water-lilies floating on the river below, that murmured along, with endless song, under the beechen-boughs. A certain softness stole over her, relaxing the cold hauteur of which Belamour had so often complained, giving a nameless charm, supplying a nameless something, lacking before, in the beauty of The Castlemaine.

She would stroke, half sadly, the smooth feathers of her tartaret falcon Gabrielle when Fulke Ravensworth brought her the bird from the ostreger's wrist, with its azure velvet hood, and silver bells and jesses. She would wonder, as she glanced through Corneille or Congreve, Philips or Petrarca, what it was, this passion of love, of which they all treated, on which they all turned, no matter how different their strain. And now and then would come over her cheek and brow a faint fitful wavering flush, delicate and changing as the flush from the rose-hued reflexions of western clouds on a statue of Pharos marble, and then she would start and rouse herself, and wonder what she ailed, and grow once more haughty, calm, stately, dazzling, but chill as the Castlemaine diamonds that she wore.

So the summer-time passed, and the autumn came, the corn-lands brown with harvest, the hazel-copses strewn with fallen nuts, the beech leaves turning into reddened gold. As the wheat ripened but to meet the sickle, as the nuts grew but to fall; as the leaves turned to gold but to wither, so the sanguine hopes, the fond ambitions of men strengthened and matured only to fade into disappointment and destruction! Four months had sped by since the Prince's messenger had come to Lilliesford—months that had gone swiftly with him as some sweet delicious dream; and the time had come when he had orders to ride north, secretly and swiftly, speak with Mr. Forster and other gentlemen concerned in the meditated rising, and convey dispatches and instructions to the Earl of Mar; for Prince James was projecting soon to join his loyal adherents in Scotland, and the critical moment was close at hand, the moment when, to Fulke Ravensworth's high and sanguine courage, victory seemed certain; failure, if no treachery marred, no dissension weakened, impossible; the moment to which he looked for honour, success, distinction, that should give him claim and title to aspire—*where?* Strong man, cool soldier though he was, he shrank from drawing his fancied future out from the golden haze of immature hope, lest he should see it wither upon closer sight. He was but a landless adventurer, with nothing but his sword and his honour, and kings he knew were slow to pay back benefits, or recollect the hands that hewed them free passage to their thrones.

Cecil Castlemaine stood within the window of her bower-room, the red light of the October sun glittering on her gold-broidered skirt and her corsage sewn with opals and emeralds; her hand was pressed lightly on her bosom, as though some pain were throbbing there; it was new this unrest, this weariness, this vague weight that hung upon her; it was the perils of their Cause, she told herself; the risks her father ran: it was weak, childish, unworthy a Castlemaine! Still the pain throbbed there.

Her hound, asleep beside her, raised his head with a low growl as a step intruded on the sanctity of the bower-room, then composed himself again to slumber, satisfied it was no foe. His mistress turned slowly; she knew the horses waited; she had shunned this ceremony of farewell, and never thought any would be bold enough to venture here without permission sought and gained.

"Lady Cecil, I could not go upon my way without one word of parting. Pardon me if I have been too rash to seek it here."

Why was it that his brief frank words ever pleased her better than Belamour's most honeyed phrases, Millamont's suavest periods? She scarcely could have told, save that there were in them an earnestness and truth new and rare to her ear and to her heart.

She pressed her hand closer on the opals—the jewels of calamity—and smiled:

"Assuredly I wish you God speed, Sir Fulke, and safe issue from all perils."

He bowed low; then raised himself to his fullest height, and stood beside her, watching the light play upon the opals:

"That is all you vouchsafe me?"

"*All?* It is as much as you would claim, sir, is it not? It is more than I would say to many."

"Your pardon—it is more than I should claim if prudence were ever by, if reason always ruled! I have no right to ask for, seek for, even wish for, more; such petitions may only be addressed by men of wealth and of high title; a landless soldier should have no pride to sting, no heart to wound; they are the prerogative of a happier fortune."

Her lips turned white, but she answered haughtily; the crimson light flashing in her jewels, heirlooms priceless and hereditary, like her beauty and her pride:

"This is strange language, sir! I fail to apprehend you."

"You have never thought that I ran a danger deadlier than that which I have ever risked on any field? You have never guessed that I have had the madness, the presumption, the crime—it may be in your eyes—to love you."

The colour flushed to her face, crimsoning even her brow, and then fled back. Her first instinct was insulted pride—a beggared gentleman, a landless soldier, spoke to her of love!—of love!—which Belamour had barely had courage to whisper of; which none had dared to sue of her in return. He had ventured to speak of this to her!

The Envoy saw the rising resentment, the pride spoken in every line of her delicate face, and stopped her as she would have spoken.

"Wait! I know all you would reply. You think it infinite daring, presumption that merits highest reproof——"

"Since you divined so justly, it were pity you subjected yourself and me to this most useless, most unexpected interview. Why——"

"*Why?* Because, perchance, in this life you will see my face no more, and you will think gently, mercifully of my offence (if offence it be to love you more than life, and only less than honour), when you know that I have fallen for the Cause, with your name in my heart, held only the dearer because never on my lips! Sincere love can be no insult to whomsoever proffered; Elizabeth Stuart saw no shame to her in the devotion of William Craven!"

Cecil Castlemaine stood in the crimson glory of the autumn sunset, her head erect, her pride unshaken, but her heart stirred strangely and unwontedly. It smote the one with bitter pain, to think a penniless exile should thus dare to speak of what Princes and Dukes had almost feared to whisper; what had she done—what had she said, to give him licence for such liberty? It stirred the other with a tremulous warmth, a vague, sweet pleasure, that were never visitants there before; but that she scouted instantly as weakness, folly, debasement, in the Last of the Castlemaines.

He saw well enough what passed within her, what made her eyes so troubled, yet her brow and lips so proudly set, and he bent nearer towards her, the great love that was in him trembling in his voice:

"Lady Cecil, hear me! If in the coming struggle I win distinction, honour, rank—if victory come to us, and the King we serve remember me in his prosperity as he does now in his adversity—if I can meet you hereafter with tidings of triumph and success, my name made one which England breathes with praise and pride, honours gained such as even you will deem worthy of your line—then—then—will you let me speak of what you refuse to hearken to now—then may I come to you, and seek a gentler answer?"

She looked for a moment upon his face, as it bent towards her in the radiance of the sunset light, the hope that hopes all things glistening in his eyes, the high-souled daring of a gallant and sanguine spirit flushing his forehead, the loud throbs of his heart audible in the stillness around; and her proud eyes grew softer, her lips quivered for an instant.

Then she turned towards him with queenly grace:

"*Yes!*"

It was spoken with stately dignity, though scarce above her breath; but the hue that wavered in her cheek was but the lovelier, for the pride that would not let her eyes droop nor her tears rise; would not let her utter one softer word. That one word cost her much. That single utterance was much from Cecil Castlemaine.

Her handkerchief lay at her feet, a delicate, costly toy of lace, embroidered with her shield and chiffre; he stooped and raised it, and thrust it to his breast to treasure it there.

"If I fail, I send this back in token that I renounce all hope; if I can come to you with honour and with fame, this shall be my gage that I may speak, that you will listen?"

She bowed her noble head, ever held haughtily, as though every crown of Europe had a right to circle it; his hot lips lingered for a moment on her hand; then Cecil Castlemaine stood alone in the window of her bower-room, her hand pressed again upon the opals under which her heart was beating with a dull, weary pain, looking out over the landscape, where the golden leaves were falling fast, and the river, tossing sadly dead branches on its waves, was bemoaning in plaintive language the summer days gone by.

Two months came and went, the beechen-boughs, black and sear, creaked in the bleak December winds that sighed through frozen ferns and over the couches of shivering deer, the snow drifted up on the marble terrace, and ice-drops clung where the warm rosy petals of the musk-rosebuds had nestled. Across the country came terrible whispers that struck the hearts of men of loyal faith to the White Rose with a bolt of ice-cold terror and despair. Messengers riding in hot haste, open-mouthed peasants gossiping by the village forge, horsemen who tarried for a breathless rest at alehouse doors, Whig divines who returned thanks for God's most gracious mercy in vouchsafing victory to the strong, all told the tale, all spread the news of the drawn battle of Sheriff-Muir, of the surrender under Preston Walls, of the flight of Prince James. The tidings came one by one to Lilliesford, where my Lord Earl was holding himself in readiness to co-operate with the gentlemen of the North to set up the royal standard, broidered by his daughter's hands, in the western counties, and proclaim James III "sovereign lord and king of the realms of Great Britain and Ireland." The tidings came to Lilliesford, and Cecil Castlemaine clenched her white jewelled hands in passionate anguish that a Stuart should have fled before the traitor of Argyll, instead of dying with his face towards the rebel crew; that men had lived who could choose surrender instead of heroic death; that *she* had not been there, at Preston, to shame them with a woman's reading of courage and of loyalty, and show them how to fall with a doomed city rather than yield captive to a foe!

Perhaps amidst her grief for her Prince and for his Cause mingled —as the deadliest thought of all—a memory of a bright proud face, that had bent towards her with tender love and touching grace a month before, and that might now be lying pale and cold, turned upwards to the winter stars, on the field of Sheriff-Muir.

A year rolled by. Twelve months had fled since the gilded carriage of the Castlemaines, with the lordly blazonment upon its panels, its princely retinue and stately pomp, had come down into the western counties. The bones were crumbling white in the coffins in the Tower, and the skulls over Temple-bar had bleached white in winter snows and spring-tide suns; Kenmuir had gone to a sleep that knew no wakening, and Derwentwater had laid his fair young head down for a thankless cause; the heather bloomed over the mounds of dead on the plains of Sheriff-Muir, and the yellow gorse blossomed under the city walls of Preston.

Another summer had dawned, bright and laughing, over England: none the less fair for human lives laid down, for human hopes crushed out; daisies powdering the turf sodden with human blood, birds carolling their song over graves of heaped up dead. The Musk-roses tossed their delicate heads again amidst the marble pilasters, and the hawthorn boughs shook their fragrant buds into the river of Lilliesford, the purple hills lay wrapped in sunny mist, and hyacinth bells mingled with the tangled grass and fern under the woodland shades, where the red deer nestled happily. Herons plumed their silvery wings down by the water-side, swallows circled in sultry air above the great bell-tower, and wood-pigeons cooed with soft love-notes among the leafy branches. Yet the Countess of Castlemaine, last of her race, sole owner of the lands that spread around her, stood on the rose-terrace, finding no joy in the sunlight about her, no melody in the song of the birds.

She was the last of her name; her father, brokenhearted at the news from Dumblain and Preston, had died the very day after his lodgement in the Tower. There was no heir male of his line, and the title had passed to his daughter; there had been thoughts of confiscation and attainder, but others, unknown to her, solicited what she scorned to ask for herself, and the greed of the hungry "Hanoverian pack" spared the lands and the revenues of Lilliesford. In haughty pride, in lonely mourning, the fairest beauty of the Court and Town withdrew again to the solitude of her western counties, and tarried there, dwelling amidst her women and her almost regal household, in the sacred solitude of grief, wherein none might intrude. Proud Cecil Castlemaine was yet prouder than of yore; alone sorrowing for her ruined Cause and exiled King, she would hold converse with none of those who had had a hand in drawing down the disastrous fate she mourned, and only her staghound could have seen the weariness upon her face when she bent down to him, or Gabrielle the falcon felt her hand tremble when it stroked her folded wings. She stood on the terrace, looking over her spreading lands, not the water-lilies on the river below whiter than her lips, pressed painfully together. Perhaps she repented of certain words, spoken to one whom now she would never again behold—perhaps she thought of that delicate toy that was to have been brought back in victory and hope, that now might lie stained and stiffened with blood next a lifeless heart, for never a word in the twelve months gone by had there come to Lilliesford as tidings of Fulke Ravensworth.

Her pride was dear to her, dearer than ought else; she had spoken as was her right to speak, she had done what became a Castlemaine; it would have been weakness to have acted otherwise; what was he—a landless soldier—that he should have dared as he had dared? Yet the sables she wore were not solely for the dead Earl, not solely for the lost Stuarts, the hot mist that would blind the eyes of Cecil Castlemaine as hours swelled to days, and days to months, and she—the flattered beauty of the Court and Town—stayed in self-chosen solitude in her halls of Lilliesford, still unwedded and unwon.

The noon hours chimed from the bell-tower, and the sunny beauty of the morning but weighed with heavier sadness on her heart; the song of the birds, the busy hum of the gnats, the joyous ring of the silver bell round her pet fawn's neck, as it darted from her side under the drooping boughs—none touched an answering chord of gladness in her. She stood looking over her stretching woodlands in deep thought, so deep that she heard no step over the lawn beneath, nor saw the frightened rush of the deer, as a boy, crouching among the tangled ferns, sprang up from his hiding-place under the beechen branches, and stood on the terrace before her, craving her pardon in childish, yet fearless tones. She turned, bending on him that glance which had made the over-bold glance of Princes fall abashed. The boy was but a little tatterdemalion to have ventured thus abruptly into the presence of the Countess of Castlemaine; still it was with some touch of a page's grace that he bowed before her.

"Lady, I crave your pardon, but my master bade me watch for you, though I watched till midnight."

"Your master!"

A flush, warm as that on the leaves of the musk-roses, rose to her face for an instant, then faded as suddenly. The boy did not notice her words, but went on in an eager whisper, glancing anxiously round, as a hare would glance fearing the hunters.

"And told me when I saw you not to speak his name, but only to give you this as his gage, that though all else is lost he has not forgot *his* honour nor *your* will."

Cecil Castlemaine spoke no word, but she stretched out her hand and took it—her own costly toy of cambric and lace, with her broidered shield and coronet.

"Your master! Then—he lives?"

"Lady, he bade me say no more. You have his message; I must tell no further."

She laid her hand upon his shoulder, a light, snow-white hand, yet one that held him now in a clasp of steel.

"Child! answer me at your peril! Tell me of him whom you call your master. Tell me all—quick—quick!"

"You are his friend?"

"His friend? My Heaven! Speak on!"

"He bade me tell no more on peril of his heaviest anger; but if you *are* his friend I sure may speak what you should know without me. It is a poor friend, lady, who has need to ask whether another be dead or living!"

The scarlet blood flamed in the Countess's blanched face, she signed him on with impetuous command; she was unused to disobedience, and the child's words cut her to the quick.

"Sir Fulke sails for the French coast to-morrow night," the boy went on, in tremulous haste. "He was left for dead—our men ran one way, and Argyll's men the other—on the field of Sheriff-Muir; and sure if he had not been strong indeed, he would have died that awful night, untended, on the bleak moor, with the wind roaring round him, and his life ebbing away. He was not one of those who *fled*; you know that of him if you know ought. We got him away before dawn, Donald and I, and hid him in a shieling; he was in the fever then, and knew nothing that was done to him, only he kept that bit of lace in his hand for weeks and weeks, and would not let us stir it from his grasp. What magic there was in it we wondered often, but 'twas a magic, mayhap, that got him well at last; it was an even chance but that he died, God bless him! though we did what best we could. We've been wandering in the Highlands all the year, hiding here and tarrying there. Sir Fulke sets no count upon his life. Sure I think he thanks us little for getting him through the fever of the wounds, but he could not have borne to be pinioned, you know, lady, like a thief, and hung up by the brutes of Whigs, as a butcher hangs sheep in the shambles! The worst of the danger's over—they've had their fill of the slaughter; but we sail to-morrow night for the French coast—England's no place for my master."

Cecil Castlemaine let go her hold upon the boy, and her hand closed convulsively upon the dainty handkerchief—her gage sent so faithfully back to her!

The child looked upon her face; perchance, in his master's delirium, he had caught some knowledge of the story that hung to that broidered toy.

"If you *are* his friend, madam, doubtless you have some last word to send him?"

Cecil Castlemaine, whom nothing moved, whom nothing softened, bowed her head at the simple question, her heart wrestling sorely, her lips set together in unswerving pride, a mist before her haughty eyes, the broidered shield upon her handkerchief—the shield of her stately and unyielding race—pressed close against her breast.

"You have no word for him, lady?"

Her lips parted; she signed him away. Was this child to see her yielding to such weakness? Had she, Countess of Castlemaine, no better pride, no better strength, no better power of resolve, than this?

The boy lingered.

"I will tell Sir Fulke then, lady, that the ruined have no friends?"

Whiter and prouder still grew the delicate beauty of her face; then she raised her stately head, haughtily as she had used to glance over a glittering Court, where each voice murmured praise of her loveliness and reproach of her coldness; and placed the fragile toy of lace back in the boy's hands.

"Go, seek your master, and give him this in gage that their calamity makes friends more dear to us than their success. Go, he will know its meaning!"

In place of the noon chimes the curfew was ringing from the bell tower, the swallows were gone to roost amidst the ivy, and the herons slept with their heads under their silvery wings among the rushes by the river-side, the ferns and wild hyacinths were damp with evening dew, and the summer starlight glistened amidst the quivering woodland leaves. There was the silence of coming night over the vast forest glades, and no sound broke the stillness, save the song of the grasshopper stirring the tangled grasses, or the sweet low sigh of the west wind fanning the bells of the flowers. Cecil Castlemaine stood once more in the rose-terrace, shrouded in the dense twilight shade flung from above by the beechen-boughs, waiting, listening, catching every rustle of the leaves, every tremor of the heads of the roses, yet hearing nothing in the stillness around but the quick, uncertain throbs of her heart beating like the wing of a caged bird under its costly lace. Pride was forgotten at length, and she only remembered—fear and love.

In the silence and the solitude came a step that she knew, came a presence that she felt. She bowed her head upon her hands; it was new to her this weakness, this terror, this anguish of joy; she sought to calm herself, to steel herself, to summon back her pride, her strength; she scorned herself for it all!

His hand touched her, his voice fell on her ear once more, eager, breathless, broken.

"Cecil! Cecil! is this true? Is my ruin thrice blessed, or am I mad, and dream of Heaven?"

She lifted her head and looked at him with her old proud glance, her lips trembling with words that all her pride could not summon into speech; then her eyes filled with warm, blinding tears, and softened to new beauty; scarce louder than the sigh of the wind among the flower-bells came her words to Fulke Ravensworth's ear, as her royal head bowed on his breast:

"Stay, stay! Or, if you fly, your exile shall be my exile, your danger my danger!"

The kerchief is a treasured heirloom to her descendants now, and fair women of her race, who inherit from her her azure eyes and her queenly grace, will recall how the proudest Countess of their Line loved a ruined gentleman so well that she was wedded to him at even, in her private chapel, at the hour of his greatest peril, his lowest fortune, and went with him across the seas till friendly intercession in high places gained them royal permission to dwell again at Lilliesford unmolested. And how it was ever noticeable to those who murmured at her coldness and her pride, that Cecil Castlemaine, cold and negligent as of yore to all the world beside, would seek her husband's smile, and love to meet his eyes, and cherish her beauty for his sake, and be restless in his absence even for the short span of a day, with a softer and more clinging tenderness than was found in many weaker, many humbler women.

They are gone now, the men and women of that generation, and their voices come only to us through the faint echo of their written words. In summer nights the old beech-trees toss their leaves in the silvery light of the stars, and the river flows on unchanged, with the ceaseless, mournful burden of its mystic song, the same now as in the midsummer of a century and a half ago. The cobweb handkerchief lies before me with its broidered shield; the same now as long years since, when it was treasured close in a soldier's breast, and held by him dearer than all save his honour and his word. So, things pulseless and passionless endure, and human life passes away as swiftly as a song dies off from the air—as quickly succeeded, and as quickly forgot! Ronsard's refrain is the refrain of our lives:

> Le temps s'en va, le temps s'en va, ma dame!
> Las! le temps, non; mais *nous* nous en allons!

HENRY JAMES

(1843–1916)

HENRY JAMES was known as Henry James, junior, until the death of his father, the well-known theological writer and lecturer, in 1882. He studied at the Harvard Law School, but jurisprudence did not attract him. He contributed to the magazines for many years, and it was not until he was thirty-two that he published his first novel, *Roderick Hudson.* This was followed by a long series of works of fiction which placed him in the forefront of novelists. Amongst them are *The American* (1878), *The Europeans* (1879), *Daisy Miller* (1879), *The Portrait of a Lady* (1881), and *The Bostonians* (1886). His later books, such as *In the Case* (1898) and *What Maisie Knew* (1901), suffer from complex treatment that makes them very difficult to read.

Henry James was born in New York, and he is only entitled to a place in this book because he made England his home for many years, and during the War, to show his sympathy with this country, became a naturalized British subject.

"The Special Type," from *The Better Sort* (1903), is reprinted by kind permission of the literary executors of the late Henry James.

THE SPECIAL TYPE

I NOTE it as a wonderful case of its kind—the finest of all perhaps, in fact, that I have ever chanced to encounter. The kind, moreover, is the greatest kind, the roll recruited, for our high esteem and emulation, from history and fiction, legend and song. In the way of service and sacrifice for love I've really known nothing go beyond it. However, you can judge. My own sense of it happens just now to be remarkably rounded off by the sequel—more or less looked for on her part—of the legal step taken by Mrs. Brivet. I hear from America that, a decent interval being held to have elapsed since her gain of her divorce, she is about to marry again—an event that will, it would seem, put an end to any question of the disclosure of the real story. It's this that's the real story, or will be, with nothing wanting, as soon as I shall have heard that her husband (who, on his side, has only been waiting for her to move first) has sanctified his union with Mrs. Cavenham.

I

She was, of course, often in and out, Mrs. Cavenham, three years ago, when I was painting her portrait; and the more so that I found her, I remember, one of those comparatively rare sitters who present themselves at odd hours, turn up without an appointment. The thing is to get most women to keep those they do make; but she used to pop in, as she called it, on the chance, letting me know that if I had a moment free she was quite at my service. When I hadn't the moment free she liked to stay to chatter, and she more than once expressed to me, I recollect, her theory that an artist really, for the time, could never see too much of his model. I must have shown her rather frankly that I understood her as meaning that a model could never see too much of her artist. I understood in fact everything, and especially that she was, in Brivet's absence, so unoccupied and restless that she didn't know what to do with herself. I was conscious in short that it was he who would pay for the picture, and that gives, I think, the measure of my enlightenment. If I took such pains and bore so with her folly, it was fundamentally for Brivet.

I was often at that time, as I had often been before, occupied—for various "subjects"—with Mrs. Dundene, in connexion with which a certain occasion comes back to me as the first slide in the lantern. If I had invented my story I couldn't have made it begin better than with Mrs. Cavenham's irruption during the presence one morning of that lady. My door, by some chance, had been unguarded, and she was upon us without a warning. This was the sort of thing my model hated—the one, I mean, who, after all, sat mainly to oblige; but I remember how well she behaved. She was not dressed for company, though indeed a dress was never strictly necessary to her best effect. I recall that I had a moment of uncertainty, but I must have dropped the name of each for the other, as it was Mrs. Cavenham's line always, later on, that I had made them acquainted; and inevitably, though I wished her not to stay and got rid of her as soon as possible, the two women, of such different places in the scale, but of such almost equal beauty, were face to face for some minutes, of which I was not even at the moment unaware that they made an extraordinary use for mutual inspection. It was sufficient; they from that instant knew each other.

"Isn't she lovely?" I remember asking—and quite without the spirit of mischief—when I came back from restoring my visitor to her cab.

"Yes, awfully pretty. But I hate her."

"Oh," I laughed, "she's not so bad as that."

"Not so handsome as I, you mean?" And my sitter protested. "It isn't fair of you to speak as if I were one of those who can't bear even at the worst—or the best—another woman's looks. I should hate her even if she were ugly."

"But what have you to do with her?"

She hesitated; then with characteristic looseness: "What have I to do with anyone?"

"Well, there's no one else I know of that you do hate."

"That shows," she replied, "how good a reason there must be, even if I don't know it yet."

She knew it in the course of time, but I have never seen a reason, I must say, operate so little for relief. As a history of the hatred of Alice Dundene my anecdote becomes wondrous indeed. Meanwhile, at any rate, I had Mrs. Cavenham again with me for her regular sitting, and quite as curious as I had expected her to be about the person of the previous time.

"Do you mean she isn't, so to speak, a lady?" she asked after I had, for reasons of my own, fenced a little. "Then if she's not 'professional' either, what is she?"

"Well," I returned as I got at work, "she escapes, to my mind, any classification save as one of the most beautiful and good-natured of women."

"I see her beauty," Mrs. Cavenham said. "It's immense. Do you mean that her good-nature's as great?"

I had to think a little. "On the whole, yes."

"Then I understand. That represents a greater quantity than *I*, I think, should ever have occasion for."

"Oh, the great thing's to be sure to have enough," I growled.

But she laughed it off. "Enough, certainly, is as good as a feast!"

It was—I forget how long, some months—after this that Frank Brivet, whom I had not seen for two years, knocked again at my door. I didn't at all object to him at my other work as I did to Mrs. Cavenham, but it was not till he had been in and out several times that Alice—which is what most people still really call her—chanced to see him and received in such an extraordinary way the impression that was to be of such advantage to him. She had been obliged to leave me that day before he went—though he stayed but a few minutes later; and it was not till the next time we were alone together that I was struck with her sudden interest, which became frankly pressing. I had met her, to begin with, expansively enough.

"An American? But what *sort*—don't you know? There are so many."

I didn't mean it as an offence, but in the matter of men, and though her acquaintance with them is so large, I always simplify with her. "*The* sort. He's rich."

"And how rich?"

"Why, *as* an American. Disgustingly."

I told her on this occasion more about him, but it was on that fact, I remember, that, after a short silence, she brought out with a sigh: "Well, I'm sorry. I should have liked to love him for himself."

II

QUITE apart from having been at school with him, I'm conscious—though at times he so puts me out—that I've a taste for Frank Brivet. I'm quite aware, by the same token—and even if when a man's so rich it's difficult to tell—that he's not everyone's affinity. I was struck, at all events, from the first of the affair, with the way he clung to me and seemed inclined to haunt my studio. He's fond of art, though he has some awful pictures, and more or less understands mine; but it wasn't this that brought him. Accustomed as I was to notice what his wealth everywhere does for him, I was rather struck with his being so much thrown upon me and not giving London—the big fish that rises so to the hook baited with gold—more of a chance to perform to him. I very soon, however, understood. He had his reasons for wishing not to be seen much with Mrs. Cavenham, and, as he was in love with her, felt the want of some machinery for keeping temporarily away from her. I was his machinery, and, when once I perceived this, was willing enough to turn his wheel. His situation, moreover, became interesting from the moment I fairly grasped it, which he soon enabled me to do. His old reserve on the subject of Mrs. Brivet went to the winds, and it's not my fault if I let him see how little I was shocked by his confidence. His marriage had originally seemed to me to require much more explanation than anyone could give, and indeed in the matter of women in general, I confess, I've never seized his point of view. His inclinations are strange, and strange, too, perhaps, his indifferences. Still, I can enter into some of his aversions, and I agreed with him that his wife was odious.

"She has hitherto, since we began practically to live apart," he said, "mortally hated the idea of doing anything so pleasant for me as to divorce me. But I've reason to believe she has now changed her mind. She'd like to get clear."

I waited a moment. "For a man?"

"Oh, such a jolly good one! Remson Sturch."

I wondered. "Do you call *him* good?"

"Good for *her*. If she only can be got to be—which it oughtn't to be difficult to make her—fool enough to marry him, he'll give her the real size of his foot, and I shall be avenged in a manner positively ideal."

"Then will she institute proceedings?"

"She can't, as things stand. She has nothing to go upon. I've been," said poor Brivet, "I positively have, so blameless." I thought of Mrs. Cavenham, and, though I said nothing, he went on after an instant as if he knew it. "They can't put a finger. I've been so d——d particular."

I hesitated. "And your idea is now not to be particular any more?"

"Oh, about *her*," he eagerly replied, "always!" On which I laughed out and he coloured. "But my idea is nevertheless, at present," he went on, "to pave the way; that is, I mean, if I can keep the person you're thinking of so totally out of it that not a breath in the whole business can possibly touch her."

"I see," I reflected. "She isn't willing?"

He stared. "To be compromised? Why the devil *should* she be?"

"Why shouldn't she—for *you?* Doesn't she love you?"

"Yes, and it's because she does, dearly, that I don't feel the right way to repay her is by spattering her over."

"Yet if she stands," I argued, "straight in the splash——!"

"She doesn't!" he interrupted me, with some curtness. "She stands a thousand miles out of it; she stands on a pinnacle; she stands as she stands in your charming portrait—lovely, lonely, untouched. And so she must remain."

"It's beautiful, it's doubtless inevitable," I returned after a little, "that you should feel so. Only, if your wife doesn't divorce you for a woman you love, I don't quite see how she can do it for the woman you don't."

"Nothing is more simple," he declared; on which I saw he had figured it out rather more than I thought. "It will be quite enough if she *believes* I love her."

"If the lady in question does—or Mrs. Brivet?"

"Mrs. Brivet—confound her! If she believes I love somebody else. I must have the appearance, and the appearance must of course be complete. All I've got to do is to take up——"

"To take up——?" I asked, as he paused.

"Well, publicly, with someone or other; someone who could easily be squared. One would undertake, after all, to produce the impression."

"On your wife naturally, you mean?"

"On my wife, and on the person concerned."

I turned it over and did justice to his ingenuity. "But what impression would you undertake to produce on——?"

"Well?" he inquired as I just faltered.

"On the person *not* concerned. How would the lady you just accused me of having in mind be affected towards such a proceeding?"

He had to think a little, but he thought with success. "Oh, I'd answer for her."

"To the other lady?" I laughed.

He remained quite grave. "To myself. She'd leave us alone. As it would be for her good, she'd understand."

I was sorry for him, but he struck me as artless. "Understand, in that interest, the 'spattering' of another person?"

He coloured again, but he was sturdy. "It must of course be exactly the right person—a special type. Someone who, in the first place," he explained, "wouldn't mind, and of whom, in the second, she wouldn't be jealous."

I followed perfectly, but it struck me as important all round that we should be clear. "But wouldn't the danger be great that any woman who shouldn't have that effect—the effect of jealousy—upon her wouldn't have it either on your wife?"

"Ah," he acutely returned, "my wife wouldn't be warned. She wouldn't be 'in the know.'"

"I see." I quite caught up. "The two other ladies distinctly would."

But he seemed for an instant at a loss. "Wouldn't it be indispensable only as regards one?"

"Then the other would be simply sacrificed?"

"She would be," Brivet splendidly put it, "remunerated."

I was pleased even with the sense of financial power betrayed by the way he said it, and I at any rate so took the measure of his intention of generosity and his characteristically big view of the matter that this quickly suggested to me what at least might be his exposure. "But suppose that, in spite of 'remuneration,' this secondary personage should perversely like you? She would have to be indeed, as you say, a special type, but even special types may have general feelings. Suppose she should like you too much."

It had pulled him up a little. "What do you mean by 'too much'?"

"Well, more than enough to leave the case quite as simple as you'd require it."

"Oh, money always simplifies. Besides, I should make a point of being a brute." And on my laughing at this: "I should pay her enough to keep her down, to make her easy. But the thing," he went on with a drop back to the less mitigated real, "the thing, hang it! is first to find her."

"Surely," I concurred; "for she should have to lack, you see, no requirement whatever for plausibility. She must be, for instance, not only 'squareable,' but—before anything else even—awfully handsome."

"Oh, 'awfully!'" He could make light of *that,* which was what Mrs. Cavenham was.

"It wouldn't do for her, at all events," I maintained, "to be a bit less attractive than——"

"Well, than who?" he broke in, not only with a comic effect of disputing my point, but also as if he knew whom I was thinking of.

Before I could answer him, however, the door opened, and we were interrupted by a visitor—a visitor who, on the spot, in a flash, primed me with a reply. But I had of course for the moment to keep it to myself. "Than Mrs. Dundene!"

III

I HAD nothing more than that to do with it, but before I could turn round it was done; by which I mean that Brivet, whose previous impression of her had, for some sufficient reason, failed of sharpness, now jumped straight to the perception that here to his hand for the solution of his problem was the missing quantity and the appointed aid. They were in presence on this occasion, for the first time, half an hour, during which he sufficiently showed me that he felt himself to have found the special type. He was certainly to that extent right that nobody could —in those days in particular—without a rapid sense that she was indeed "special," spend any such time in the company of our extraordinary friend. I couldn't quarrel with his recognising so quickly what I had myself instantly recognised, yet if it did in truth appear almost at a glance that she would, through the particular facts of situation, history, aspect, tone, temper, beautifully "do," I felt from the first so affected by the business that I desired to wash my hands of it. There was something I wished to say to him before it went further, but after that I cared only to be out of it. I may as well say at once, however, that I never *was* out of it; for a man habitually ridden by the twin demons of imagination and observation is never—enough for his peace —out of anything. But I wanted to be able to apply to either, should anything happen: "'Thou canst not say *I* did it!'" What might in particular happen was represented by what I said to Brivet the first time he gave me a chance. It was what I had wished before the affair went further, but it had then already gone so far that he had been twice—as he immediately let me know—to see her at home. He clearly desired me to keep up with him, which I was eager to declare impossible; but he came again to see me only after he had called. Then I instantly made my point, which was that she was really, hang it! too good for his fell purpose.

"But, my dear man, my purpose is a sacred one. And if, moreover, she herself doesn't think she's too good——"

"Ah," said I, "she's in love with you, and so it isn't fair."

He wondered. "Fair to *me?*"

"Oh, I don't care a button for you! What I'm thinking of is her risk."

"And what do you mean by her risk?"

"Why, her finding, of course, before you've done with her, that she can't do without you."

He met me as if he had quite thought of that. "Isn't it much more *my* risk?"

"Ah, but you take it deliberately, walk into it with your eyes open. What I want to be sure of, liking her as I do, is that she fully understands."

He had been moving about my place with his hands in his pockets, and at this he stopped short. "How much do you like her?"

"Oh, ten times more than she likes me; so *that* needn't trouble you. Does she understand that it can be only to help somebody else?"

"Why, my dear chap, she's as sharp as a steam-whistle."

"So that she also already knows who the other person is?"

He took a turn again, then brought out: "There's no other person for her but me. Of course, as yet, there are things one doesn't say; I haven't set straight to work to dot all my i's, and the beauty of her, as she's really charming—and would be charming in *any* relation—is just exactly that I don't expect to have to. We'll work it out all right, I think, so that what I most wanted just to make sure of from you was what you've been good enough to tell me. I mean that you don't object—for yourself."

I could with philosophic mirth allay that scruple, but what I couldn't do was to let him see what really most worried me. It stuck, as they say, in my crop that a woman like—yes, when all was said and done—Alice Dundene should simply minister to the convenience of a woman like Rose Cavenham. "But there's one thing more." This was as far as I could go. "I may take from you then that she not only knows it's for your divorce and re-marriage, but can fit the shoe on the very person?"

He waited a moment. "Well, you may take from me that I find her no more of a fool than, as I seem to see, many other fellows have found her."

I too was silent a little, but with a superior sense of being able to think it all out further than he. "She's magnificent!"

"Well, so am I!" said Brivet. And for months afterward there was much—in fact everything—in the whole picture to justify his claim. I remember how it struck me as a lively sign of this that Mrs. Cavenham, at an early day, gave up her pretty house in Wilton Street and withdrew for a time to America. That was palpable design and diplomacy, but I'm afraid that I quite as much, and doubtless very vulgarly, read into it that she had had money from Brivet to go. I even promised myself, I confess, the entertainment of finally making out that, whether or no the marriage should come off, she would not have been the person to find the episode least lucrative.

She left the others, at all events, completely together, and so, as the plot, with this, might be said definitely to thicken, it came to me in all sorts of ways that the curtain had gone up on the drama. It came to me, I hasten to add, much less from the two actors themselves than from other quarters—the usual sources, which never fail, of chatter; for after my friends' direction was fairly taken they had the good taste on either side to handle it, in talk, with gloves, not to expose it to what I should have called the danger of definition. I even seemed to divine that, allowing for needful preliminaries, they dealt even with each other on this same unformulated plane, and that it well might be that no relation in London at that moment, between a remarkable man and a beautiful woman, had more of the general air of good manners. I saw for a long time, directly, but little of them, for they were naturally much taken up, and Mrs. Dundene in particular intermitted, as she had never yet done in any complication of her chequered career, her calls at my studio. As the months went by I couldn't but feel—partly, perhaps, for this very reason—that their undertaking announced itself as likely not to fall short of its aim. I gathered from the voices of the air that nothing whatever was neglected that could make it a success, and just this vision it was that made me privately project wonders into it, caused anxiety and curiosity often again to revisit me, and led me in fine to say to myself that so rich an effect could be arrived at on either side only by a great deal of heroism. As the omens markedly developed I supposed the heroism had likewise done so, and that the march of the matter was logical I inferred from the fact that even though the ordeal, all round, was more protracted than might have been feared, Mrs. Cavenham made no fresh appearance. This I took as a sign that she knew she was safe—took indeed as the feature not the least striking of the situation constituted in her interest. I held my tongue, naturally, about her interest, but I watched it from a distance with an attention that, had I been caught in the act, might have led to a mistake about the direction of my sympathy. I had to make it my proper secret that, while I lost as little as possible of what was being done for her, I felt more and more that I myself could never have begun to do it.

IV

She came back at last, however, and one of the first things she did on her arrival was to knock at my door and let me know immediately, to smooth the way, that she was there on particular business. I was not to be surprised—though even if I were she shouldn't mind—to hear that she wished to bespeak from me, on the smallest possible delay, a portrait, full-length for preference, of our delightful friend Mr. Brivet. She brought this out with a light perfection of assurance of which the first effect—I couldn't help it—was to make me show myself almost too much amused for good manners. She first stared at my laughter, then wonderfully joined in it, looking meanwhile extraordinarily pretty and elegant—more completely handsome in fact, as well as more completely happy, than I had ever yet seen her. She was distinctly the better, I quickly saw, for what was being done for her, and it was an odd spectacle indeed that while, out of her sight and to the exclusion of her very name, the good work went on, it put roses in her cheeks and rings on her fingers and the sense of success in her heart. What had made me laugh, at all events, was the number of other ideas suddenly evoked by her request, two of which, the next moment, had disengaged themselves with particular brightness. She wanted, for all her confidence, to omit no precaution, to close up every issue, and she had acutely conceived that the possession of Brivet's picture—full-length, above all!—would constitute for her the strongest possible appearance of holding his supreme pledge. If that had been her foremost thought her second then had been that if I should paint him he would have to sit, and that in order to sit he would have to return. He had been at this time, as I knew, for many weeks in foreign cities—which helped moreover to explain to me that Mrs. Cavenham had thought it compatible with her safety to re-open her London house. Everything accordingly seemed to make for a victory, but there *was* such a thing, her proceeding implied, as one's—at least as *her*—susceptibility and her nerves. This question of his return I of course immediately put to her; on which she immediately answered that it was expressed in her very proposal, inasmuch as this proposal was nothing but the offer that Brivet had himself made her. The thing was to be his gift; she had only, he had assured her, to choose her artist and arrange the time; and she had amiably chosen me—chosen me for the dates, as she called them, immediately before us. I doubtless—but I don't care—give the measure of my native cynicism in confessing that I didn't the least avoid showing her that I saw through her game. "Well, I'll do him," I said, "if he'll come himself and ask me."

She wanted to know, at this, of course, if I impugned her veracity. "You don't believe what I tell you? You're afraid for your money?"

I took it in high good-humour. "For my money not a bit."

"For what then?"

I had to think first how much I could say, which seemed to me, naturally, as yet but little. "I know perfectly that whatever happens Brivet always pays. But let him come; then we'll talk."

"Ah, well," she returned, "you'll see if he doesn't come." And come he did in fact—though without a word from myself directly—at the end of ten days; on which we immediately got to work, an idea highly favourable to it having meanwhile shaped itself in my own breast. Meanwhile too, however, before his arrival, Mrs. Cavenham had been again to see me, and this it was precisely, I think, that determined my idea. My present explanation of what afresh passed between us is that she really felt the need to build up her security a little higher by borrowing from my own vision of what had been happening. I had not, she saw, been very near to that, but I had been at least, during her time in America, nearer than she. And I had doubtless somehow "aggravated" her by appearing to disbelieve in the guarantee she had come in such pride to parade to me. It had in any case befallen that, on the occasion of her second visit, what I least expected or desired—her avowal of being "in the know"—suddenly went too far to stop. When she did speak she spoke with elation. "Mrs. Brivet has filed her petition."

"For getting rid of him?"

"Yes, in order to marry again; which is exactly what he wants her to do. It's wonderful—and, in a manner, I think, quite splendid—the way he has made it easy for her. He has met her wishes handsomely—obliged her in every particular."

As she preferred, subtly enough, to put it all as if it were for the sole benefit of his wife, I was quite ready for this tone; but I privately defied her to keep it up. "Well, then, he hasn't laboured in vain."

"Oh, it *couldn't* have been in vain. What has happened has been the sort of thing that she couldn't possibly fail to act upon."

"Too great a scandal, eh?"

She but just paused at it. "Nothing neglected, certainly, or omitted. He was not the man to undertake it——"

"And not put it through? No, I should say he wasn't the man. In any case he apparently hasn't been. But he must have found the job——"

"Rather a bore?" she asked as I had hesitated.

"Well, not so much a bore as a delicate matter."

She seemed to demur. "Delicate?"

"Why, your sex likes him so."

"But isn't just that what has made it easy?"

"Easy for *him*—yes," I after a moment admitted.

But it wasn't what she meant. "And not difficult, also, for *them.*"

This was the nearest approach I was to have heard her make, since the day of the meeting of the two women at my studio, to naming Mrs. Dundene. She never, to the end of the affair, came any closer to her in speech than by the collective and promiscuous plural pronoun. There might have been a dozen of them, and she took cognisance, in respect to them, only of quantity. It was as if it had been a way of showing how little of anything else she imputed. Quality, as distinguished from quantity, was what *she* had. "Oh, I think," I said, "that we can scarcely speak for them."

"Why not? They must certainly have had the most beautiful time. Operas, theatres, suppers, dinners, diamonds, carriages, journeys hither and yon with him, poor dear, telegrams sent by each from everywhere to everywhere and always lying about, elaborate arrivals and departures at stations for everyone to see, and, in fact, quite a crowd usually collected—as many witnesses as you like. Then," she wound up, "his brougham standing always—half the day and half the night—at their doors. He has had to keep a brougham, and the proper sort of man, just for that alone. In other words unlimited publicity."

"I see. What more can they have wanted? Yes," I pondered, "they like, for the most part, we suppose, a studied, outrageous *affichage*, and they must have thoroughly enjoyed it."

"Ah, but it was only that."

I wondered. "Only what?"

"Only *affiché*. Only outrageous. Only the *form* of—well, of what would definitely serve. He never saw them alone."

I wondered—or at least appeared to—still more. "Never?"

"Never. Never once." She had a wonderful air of answering for it. "I know."

I saw that, after all, she really believed she knew, and I had indeed, for that matter, to recognise that I myself believed her knowledge to be sound. Only there went with it a complacency, an enjoyment of having really made me see what could be done for her, so little to my taste that for a minute or two I could scarce trust myself to speak: she looked somehow, as she sat there, so lovely, and yet, in spite of her loveliness—or perhaps even just because of it—so smugly selfish; she put it to me with so small a consciousness of anything but her personal triumph that, while she had kept her skirts clear, her name unuttered and her reputation untouched, "they" had been in it even more than her success required. It was their skirts, their name, and their reputation that, in the proceedings at hand, would bear the brunt. It was only after waiting a while that I could at last say: "You're perfectly sure then of Mrs. Brivet's intention?"

"Oh, we've had formal notice."

"And he's himself satisfied of the sufficiency——?"

"Of the sufficiency——?"

"Of what he has done."

She rectified. "Of what he has *appeared* to do."

"That *is* then enough?"

"Enough," she laughed, "to send him to the gallows!" To which I could only reply that all was well that ended well.

V

ALL for me, however, as it proved, had not ended yet. Brivet, as I have mentioned, duly reappeared to sit for me, and Mrs. Cavenham, on his arrival, as consistently went abroad. He confirmed to me that lady's news of how he had "fetched," as he called it, his wife—let me know, as decently owing to me after what had passed, on the subject, between us, that the forces set in motion had logically operated; but he made no other allusion to his late accomplice—for I now took for granted the close of the connexion—than was conveyed in this intimation. He spoke—and the effect was almost droll—as if he had had, since our previous meeting, a busy and responsible year and wound up an affair (as he was accustomed to wind up affairs) involving a mass of detail; he even dropped into occasional reminiscence of what he had seen and enjoyed and disliked during a recent period of rather far-reaching adventure; but he stopped just as short as Mrs. Cavenham had done—and, indeed, much shorter than she—of introducing Mrs. Dundene by name into our talk. And what was singular in this, I soon saw, was—apart from a general discretion—that he abstained not at all because his mind was troubled, but just because, on the contrary, it was so much at ease. It was perhaps even more singular still, meanwhile, that, though I had scarce been able to bear Mrs. Cavenham's manner in this particular, I found I could put up perfectly with that of her friend. She had annoyed me, but he didn't—I give the inconsistency for what it is worth. The obvious state of his conscience had always been a strong point in him and one that exactly irritated some people as much as it charmed others; so that if, in general, it was positively, and in fact quite aggressively approving, this monitor, it had never held its head so high as at the juncture of which I speak. I took all this in with eagerness, for I saw how it would play into my work. Seeking as I always do, instinctively, to represent sitters in the light of the thing, whatever it may be, that facially, least wittingly or responsibly, gives the pitch of their aspect, I felt immediately that I should have the clue for making a capital thing of Brivet were I to succeed in showing him in just this freshness of his cheer. His cheer was that of his being able to say to himself that he had got all he wanted precisely *as* he wanted: without having harmed a fly. He had arrived so neatly where most men arrive besmirched, and what he seemed to cry out as he stood before my canvas—wishing everyone well all round—was: "See how clever and pleasant and practicable, how jolly and lucky and rich I've been!" I determined, at all events, that I would make some such characteristic words as these cross, at any cost, the footlights, as it were, of my frame.

Well, I can't but feel to this hour that I really hit my nail—that the man *is* fairly painted in the light and that the work remains as yet my high-water mark. He himself was delighted with it—and all the more, I think, that before it was finished he received from America the news of his liberation. He had not defended the suit—as to which judgment, therefore, had been expeditiously rendered; and he was accordingly free as air and with the added sweetness of every augmented appearance that his wife was herself blindly preparing to seek chastisement at the hands of destiny. There being at last no obstacle to his open association with Mrs. Cavenham, he called her directly back to London to admire my achievement, over which, from the very first glance, she as amiably let herself go. It was the very view of him she had desired to possess; it was the dear man in his intimate essence for those who knew him; and for anyone who should ever be deprived of him it would be the next best thing to the sound of his voice. We of course by no means lingered, however, on the contingency of privation, which was promptly swept away in the rush of Mrs. Cavenham's vision of how straight also, above and beyond, I had, as she called it, attacked. I couldn't quite myself, I fear, tell how straight, but Mrs. Cavenham perfectly could, and did, for everybody: she had at her fingers' ends all the reasons why the thing would be a treasure even for those who had never seen "Frank."

I had finished the picture, but was, according to my practice, keeping it near me a little, for afterthoughts, when I received from Mrs. Dundene the first visit she had paid me for many a month. "I've come," she immediately said, "to ask you a favour"; and she turned her eyes, for a minute, as if contentedly full of her thought, round the large workroom she already knew so well and in which her beauty had really rendered more services than could ever be repaid. There were studies of her yet on the walls; there were others thrust away in corners; others still had gone forth from where she stood and carried to far-away places the reach of her lingering look. I had greatly, almost inconveniently missed her, and I don't know why it was that she struck me now as more beautiful than ever. She had always, for that matter, had a way of seeming each time a little different and a little better. Dressed very simply in black materials, feathers and lace, that gave the impression of being light and fine, she had indeed the air of a special type, but quite as some great lady might have had it. She looked like a princess in Court mourning. Oh, she had been a case for the petitioner—was everything the other side wanted! "Mr. Brivet," she went on to say, "has kindly offered me a present. I'm to ask of him whatever in the world I most desire."

I knew in an instant, on this, what was coming, but I was at first wholly taken up with the simplicity of her allusion to her late connexion. Had I supposed that, like Brivet, she wouldn't allude to it at all? or had I stupidly assumed that if she did it would be with ribaldry and rancour? I hardly know; I only know that I suddenly found myself charmed to receive from her thus the key of my own freedom. There was something I wanted to say to her, and she had thus given me leave. But for the moment I only repeated as with amused interest: "Whatever in the world——?"

"Whatever in all the world."

"But that's immense, and in what way can poor *I* help——?"

"By painting him for me. I want a portrait of him."

I looked at her a moment in silence. She was lovely. "That's what—'in all the world'—you've chosen?"

"Yes—thinking it over: full-length. I want it for remembrance, and I want it as you will do it. It's the only thing I do want."

"Nothing else?"

"Oh, it's enough." I turned about—she was wonderful. I had whisked out of sight for a month the picture I had produced for Mrs. Cavenham, and it was now completely covered with a large piece of stuff. I stood there a little, thinking of it, and she went on as if she feared I might be unwilling. "*Can't* you do it?"

It showed me that she had not heard from him of my having painted him, and this, further, was an indication that, his purpose effected, he had ceased to see her. "I suppose you know," I presently said, "what you've done for him?"

"Oh, yes; it was what I wanted."

"It was what *he* wanted!" I laughed.

"Well, I want what he wants."

"Even to his marrying Mrs. Cavenham?"

She hesitated. "As well her as anyone, from the moment he couldn't marry *me*."

"It was beautiful of you to be sure of that," I returned.

"How could I be anything else but sure? He doesn't so much as *know* me!" said Alice Dundene.

"No," I declared, "I verily believe he doesn't. There's your picture," I added, unveiling my work.

She was amazed and delighted. "I may have *that?*"

"So far as I'm concerned—absolutely."

"Then he had himself the beautiful thought of sitting for me?"

I faltered but an instant. "Yes."

Her pleasure in what I had done was a joy to me. "Why, it's of a truth! It's perfection."

"I think it is."

"It's the whole story. It's life."

"That's what I tried for," I said; and I added to myself: "Why the deuce *do* we?"

"It will be *him* for me," she meanwhile went on. "I shall *live* with it, keep it all to myself, and—do you know what it will do? It will seem to make up."

"To make up?"

"I never saw him alone," said Mrs. Dundene.

I am still keeping the thing to send to her, punctually, on the day he's married; but I had of course, on my understanding with her, a tremendous bout with Mrs. Cavenham, who protested with indignation against my "base treachery" and made to Brivet an appeal for redress which, enlightened, face to face with the magnificent humility of his other friend's selection, he couldn't, for shame, entertain. All he was able to do was to suggest to me that I might for one or other of the ladies, at my choice, do him again; but I had no difficulty in replying that my best was my best and that what was done was done. He assented with the awkwardness of a man in dispute between women, and Mrs. Cavenham remained furious. "Can't 'they'—of *all* possible things, think!—take something else?"

"Oh, they want *him!*"

"Him?" It was monstrous.

"To live with," I explained, "to make up."

"To make up for what?"

"Why, you know, they never saw him alone."

THOMAS HARDY

(1840–1928)

THOMAS HARDY, O.M., is ranked among the greatest authors of the nineteenth century. He was born in Dorsetshire, a county that he loved, and made the background of the great series of "Wessex" novels. He was trained as an ecclesiastical architect in 1863. He wrote poetry from 1860 to 1868, and then turned his attention to prose, though he presently returned to his first love, writing the epic-drama *The Dynasts* (1904–8). His first novels were *Desperate Remedies* (1871), *Under the Greenwood Tree* (1872), and *Far from the Madding Crowd* (1874). *Tess of the*

D'Urbervilles (1891) gave him a yet wider popularity. An outcry against *Jude the Obscure* (1895) decided him to produce no more works of fiction.

"The Melancholy Hussar," from *Life's Little Ironies*, is reprinted by kind permission of the executors of the late Thomas Hardy, and Messrs. Macmillan and Sons, Ltd.

THE MELANCHOLY HUSSAR OF THE GERMAN LEGION

HERE stretch the downs, high and breezy and green, absolutely unchanged since those eventful days. A plough has never disturbed the turf, and the sod that was uppermost then is uppermost now. Here stood the camp; here are distinct traces of the banks thrown up for the horses of the cavalry, and spots where the midden-heaps lay are still to be observed. At night, when I walk across the lonely place, it is impossible to avoid hearing, amid the scourings of the wind over the grass-bents and thistles, the old trumpet and bugle calls, the rattle of the halters; to help seeing rows of spectral tents and the *impedimenta* of the soldiery. From within the canvases come guttural syllables of foreign tongues, and broken songs of the fatherland; for they were mainly regiments of the King's German Legion that slept round the tent-poles hereabout at that time.

It was nearly ninety years ago. The British uniform of the period, with its immense epaulettes, queer cocked-hat, breeches, gaiters, ponderous cartridge-box, buckled shoes, and what not, would look strange and barbarous now. Ideas have changed; invention has followed invention. Soldiers were monumental objects then. A divinity still hedged kings here and there; and war was considered a glorious thing.

Secluded old manor-houses and hamlets lie in the ravines and hollows among these hills, where a stranger had hardly ever been seen till the King chose to take the baths yearly at the seaside watering-place a few miles to the south; as a consequence of which battalions descended in a cloud upon the open country around. Is it necessary to add that the echoes of many characteristic tales, dating from that picturesque time, still linger about here in more or less fragmentary form, to be caught by the attentive ear? Some of them I have repeated; most of them I have forgotten; one I have never repeated, and assuredly can never forget.

Phyllis told me the story with her own lips. She was then an old lady of seventy-five, and her auditor a lad of fifteen. She enjoined silence as to her share in the incident, till she should be "dead, buried, and forgotten." Her life was prolonged twelve years after the day of her narration, and she has now been dead nearly twenty. The oblivion which in her modesty and humility she courted for herself has only partially fallen on her, with the unfortunate result of inflicting an injustice upon her memory; since such fragments of her story as got abroad at the time, and have been kept alive ever since, are precisely those which are most unfavourable to her character.

It all began with the arrival of the York Hussars, one of the foreign regiments above alluded to. Before that day scarcely a soul had been seen near her father's house for weeks. When a noise like the brushing skirt of a visitor was heard on the doorstep, it proved to be a scudding leaf; when a carriage seemed to be nearing the door, it was her father grinding his sickle on the stone in the garden for his favourite relaxation of trimming the box-tree borders to the plots. A sound like luggage thrown down from the coach was a gun far away at sea; and what looked like a tall man by the gate at dusk was a yew bush cut into a quaint and attenuated shape. There is no such solitude in country places now as there was in those old days.

Yet all the while King George and his court were at his favourite seaside resort, not more than five miles off.

The daughter's seclusion was great, but beyond the seclusion of the girl lay the seclusion of the father. If her social condition was twilight, his was darkness. Yet he enjoyed his darkness, while her twilight oppressed her. Dr. Grove had been a professional man whose taste for lonely meditation over metaphysical questions had diminished his practice till it no longer paid him to keep it going; after which he had relinquished it and hired at a nominal rent the small, dilapidated, half farm, half manor-house of this obscure inland nook, to make a sufficiency of an income which in town would have been inadequate for their maintenance. He stayed in his garden the greater part of the day, growing more and more irritable with the lapse of time, and the increasing perception that he had wasted his life in the pursuit of illusions. He saw his friends less and less frequently. Phyllis became so shy that if she met a stranger anywhere in her short rambles she felt ashamed at his gaze, walked awkwardly, and blushed to her shoulders.

Yet Phyllis was discovered even here by an admirer, and her hand most unexpectedly asked in marriage.

The King, as aforesaid, was at the neighbouring town, where he had taken up his abode at Gloucester Lodge; and his presence in the town naturally brought many county people thither. Among these idlers—many of whom professed to have connexions and interests with the Court—was one Humphrey Gould, a bachelor; a personage neither young nor old; neither good-looking nor positively plain. Too steady-going to be "a buck" (as fast and unmarried men were then called), he was an approximately fashionable man of a mild type. This bachelor of thirty found his way to the village on the down: beheld

Phyllis; made her father's acquaintance in order to make hers; and by some means or other she sufficiently inflamed his heart to lead him in that direction almost daily; till he became engaged to marry her.

As he was of an old local family, some of whose members were held in respect in the county, Phyllis, in bringing him to her feet had accomplished what was considered a brilliant move for one in her constrained position. How she had done it was not quite known to Phyllis herself. In those days unequal marriages were regarded rather as a violation of the laws of nature than as a mere infringement of convention, the more modern view, and hence when Phyllis, of the watering-place *bourgeoisie*, was chosen by such a gentlemanly fellow, it was as if she were going to be taken to Heaven, though perhaps the uninformed would have seen no great difference in the respective positions of the pair, the said Gould being as poor as a crow.

This pecuniary condition was his excuse—probably a true one—for postponing their union, and as the winter drew nearer, and the King departed for the season, Mr. Humphrey Gould set out for Bath, promising to return to Phyllis in a few weeks. The winter arrived, the date of his promise passed, yet Gould postponed his coming, on the ground that he could not very easily leave his father in the city of their sojourn, the elder having no other relative near him. Phyllis, though lonely in the extreme, was content. The man who had asked her in marriage was a desirable husband for her in many ways; her father highly approved of his suit; but this neglect of her was awkward, if not painful, for Phyllis. Love him in the true sense of the word she assured me she never did, but she had a genuine regard for him; admired a certain methodical and dogged way in which he sometimes took his pleasure; valued his knowledge of what the Court was doing, had done, or was about to do; and she was not without a feeling of pride that he had chosen her when he might have exercised a more ambitious choice.

But he did not come; and the spring developed. His letters were regular though formal; and it is not to be wondered that the uncertainty of her position, linked with the fact that there was not much passion in her thoughts of Humphrey, bred an indescribable dreariness in the heart of Phyllis Grove. The spring was soon summer, and the summer brought the King; but still no Humphrey Gould. All this while the engagement by letter was maintained intact.

At this point of time a golden radiance flashed in upon the lives of people here, and charged all youthful thought with emotional interest. This radiance was the aforesaid York Hussars.

II

The present generation has probably but a very dim notion of the celebrated York Hussars of ninety years ago. They were one of the regiments of the King's German Legion, and (though they somewhat degenerated later on) their brilliant uniform, their splendid horses, and above all, their foreign air and moustachios (rare appendages then), drew crowds of admirers of both sexes wherever they went. These with other regiments had come to encamp on the downs and pastures, because of the presence of the King in the neighbouring town.

The spot was high and airy, and the view extensive, commanding the Isle of Portland in front, and reaching to St. Aldhelm's Head eastward, and almost to the Start on the west.

Phyllis, though not precisely a girl of the village, was as interested as any of them in this military investment. Her father's home stood somewhat apart, and on the highest point of ground to which the lane ascended, so that it was almost level with the top of the church tower in the lower part of the parish. Immediately from the outside of the garden-wall the grass spread away to a great distance, and it was crossed by a path which came close to the wall. Ever since her childhood it had been Phyllis's pleasure to clamber up this fence and sit on the top—a feat not so difficult as it may seem, the walls in this district being built of rubble, without mortar, so that there were plenty of crevices for small toes.

She was sitting up here one day, listlessly surveying the pasture without, when her attention was arrested by a solitary figure walking along the path. It was one of the renowned German Hussars, and he moved onward with his eyes on the ground, and with the manner of one who wished to escape company. His head would probably have been bent like his eyes but for his stiff neck-gear. On nearer view she perceived that his face was marked with deep sadness. Without observing her, he advanced by the footpath till it brought him almost immediately under the wall.

Phyllis was much surprised to see a fine, tall soldier in such a mood as this. Her theory of the military, and of the York Hussars in particular (derived entirely from hearsay, for she had never talked to a soldier in her life), was that their hearts were as gay as their accoutrements.

At this moment the Hussar lifted his eyes and noticed her on her perch, the white muslin neckerchief which covered her shoulders and neck where left bare by her low gown, and her white raiment in general, showing conspicuously in the bright sunlight of this summer day. He blushed a little at the suddenness of the encounter, and without halting a moment from his pace passed on.

All that day the foreigner's face haunted Phyllis; its aspect was so striking, so handsome, and his eyes were so blue, and sad, and abstracted. It was perhaps only natural that on some following day at the same hour she should look over that wall again, and wait till he had passed a second time. On this occasion he was reading a letter, and at the sight of her his manner was that of one who had half expected or hoped to discover her. He almost stopped, smiled, and made a courteous salute. The end of the meeting was that they exchanged a few words. She asked him what he was reading, and he readily informed her that he was re-perusing letters from his mother in Germany; he did not get them often, he said, and was forced to read the old ones a great many times. This was all that passed at the present interview, but others of the same kind followed.

Phyllis used to say that his English, though not good, was quite intelligible to her, so that their acquaintance was never hindered by difficulties of speech. Whenever the subject became too delicate, subtle, or tender, for such words of English as were at his command, the eyes no doubt helped out the tongue, and—though this was later—the lips helped out the eyes. In short this acquaintance, unguardedly made, and rash enough on her part, developed and ripened. Like Desdemona, she pitied him, and learnt his history.

His name was Matthäus Tina, and Saarbrück his native town, where his mother was still living. His age was twenty-two, and he had already risen to the grade of corporal, though he had not long been in the army. Phyllis used to assert that no such refined or well-educated young man could have been found in the ranks of the purely English regiments, some of these foreign soldiers having rather the graceful manner and presence of our native officers than of our rank and file.

She by degrees learnt from her foreign friend a circumstance about himself and his comrades which Phyllis would least have expected of the York Hussars. So far from being as gay as its uniform, the regiment was pervaded by a dreadful melancholy, a chronic homesickness, which depressed many of the men to such an extent that they could hardly attend to their drill. The worst sufferers were the younger soldiers who had not been over here long. They hated England and English life; they took no interest whatever in King George and his island kingdom, and they only wished to be out of it and never to see it any more. Their bodies were here, but their hearts and minds were always far away in their dear fatherland, of which—brave men and stoical as they were in many ways—they would speak with tears in their eyes. One of the worst of the sufferers from this home-woe, as he called it in his own tongue, was Matthäus Tina, whose dreamy musing nature felt the gloom of exile still more intensely from the fact that he had left a lonely mother at home with nobody to cheer her.

Though Phyllis, touched by all this, and interested in his history, did not disdain her soldier's acquaintance she declined (according to her own account, at least) to permit the young man to overstep the line of mere friendship for a long while—as long, indeed, as she considered herself likely to become the possession of another; though it is probable that she had lost her heart to Matthäus before she was herself aware. The stone wall of necessity made anything like intimacy difficult; and he had never ventured to come, or to ask to come, inside the garden, so that all their conversation had been overtly conducted across this boundary.

III

But news reached the village from a friend of Phyllis's father concerning Mr. Humphrey Gould, her remarkably cool and patient betrothed. This gentleman had been heard to say in Bath that he considered his overtures to Miss Phyllis Grove to have reached only the stage of a half-understanding; and in view of his enforced absence on his father's account, who was too great an invalid now to attend to his affairs, he thought it best that there should be no definite promise as yet on either side. He was not sure, indeed, that he might not cast his eyes elsewhere.

This account—though only a piece of hearsay, and as such entitled to no absolute credit—tallied so well with the infrequency of his letters and their lack of warmth, that Phyllis did not doubt its truth for one moment; and from that hour she felt herself free to bestow her heart as she should choose. Not so her father; he declared the whole story to be a fabrication. He had known Mr. Gould's family from his boyhood; and if there was one proverb which expressed the matrimonial aspect of that family well, it was: "Love me little, love me long." Humphrey was an honourable man, who would not think of treating his engagement so lightly. "Do you wait in patience," he said; "all will be right enough in time."

From these words Phyllis at first imagined that her father was in correspondence with Mr. Gould; and her heart sank within her; for in spite of her original intentions she had been relieved to hear that her engagement had come to nothing. But she presently learnt that her father had heard no more of Humphrey Gould than she herself had done; while he would not write and address her affianced directly on the subject, lest it should be deemed an imputation on that bachelor's honour.

"You want an excuse for encouraging one or other of those foreign fellows to flatter you with his unmeaning attentions," her father exclaimed, his mood having of late been a very unkind one towards her. "I see more than I say. Don't you ever set foot outside that garden-fence without my permission. If you want to see the camp I'll take you myself some Sunday afternoon."

Phyllis had not the smallest intention of disobeying him in her actions, but she assumed herself to be independent with respect to her feelings. She no longer checked her fancy for the Hussar, though she was far from regarding him as her lover in the serious sense in which an Englishman might have been regarded as such. The young foreign soldier was almost an ideal being to her, with none of the appurtenances of an ordinary house-dweller; one who had descended she knew not whence, and would disappear she knew not whither; the subject of a fascinating dream—no more.

They met continually now—mostly at dusk—during the brief interval between the going down of the sun and the minute at which the last trumpet-call summoned him to his tent. Perhaps her manner had become less restrained latterly; at any rate that of the Hussar was so; he had grown more tender every day, and at parting after these hurried interviews she reached down her hand from the top of the wall that he might press it. One evening he held it so long that she exclaimed, "The wall is white, and somebody in the field may see your shape against it!"

He lingered so long that night that it was with the greatest difficulty that he could run across the intervening stretch of ground and enter the camp in time. On the next occasion of his awaiting her she did not appear in her usual place at the usual hour. His disappointment was unspeakably keen; he remained staring blankly at the spot, like a man in a trance. The trumpets and tattoo sounded, and still he did not go.

She had been delayed purely by an accident. When she arrived she was anxious because of the lateness of the hour, having heard as well as he the sounds denoting the closing of the camp. She implored him to leave immediately.

"No," he said gloomily. "I shall not go in yet—the moment you come—I have thought of your coming all day."

"But you may be disgraced at being after time?"

"I don't mind that. I should have disappeared from the world some time ago if it had not been for two persons—my beloved, here, and my mother in Saarbrück. I hate the army. I care more for a minute of your company than for all the promotion in the world."

Thus he stayed and talked to her, and told her interesting details of his native place, and incidents of his childhood, till she was in a simmer of distress at his recklessness in remaining. It was only because she insisted on bidding him good night and leaving the wall that he returned to his quarters.

The next time that she saw him he was without the stripes that had adorned his sleeve. He had been broken to the level of private for his lateness that night; and as Phyllis considered herself to be the cause of his disgrace her sorrow was great. But the position was now reversed; it was his turn to cheer her.

"Don't grieve, meine Liebliche!" he said. "I have got a remedy for whatever comes. First, even supposing I regain my stripes, would your father allow you to marry a non-commissioned officer in the York Hussars?"

She flushed. This practical step had not been in her mind in relation to such an unrealistic person as he was; and a moment's reflection was enough for it. "My father would not—certainly would not," she answered unflinchingly. "It cannot be thought of! My dear friend, please do forget me: I fear I am ruining you and your prospects!"

"Not at all!" he said. "You are giving this country of yours just sufficient interest to me to make me care to keep alive in it. If my dear land were here also, and my old parent, with you, I could be happy as I am, and would do my best as a soldier. But it is not so. And now listen. This is my plan. That you go with me to my own country, and be my wife there, and live there with my mother and me. I am not a Hanoverian, as you know, though I entered the army as such; my country is by the Saar, and is at peace with France, and if I were once in it I should be free."

"But how get there?" she asked. Phyllis had been rather amazed than shocked at his proposition. Her position in her father's house was growing irksome and painful in the extreme; his parental affection seemed to be quite dried up. She was not a native of the village, like all the joyous girls around her; and in some way Matthäus Tina had infected her with his own passionate longing for his country, and mother, and home.

"But how?" she repeated, finding that he did not answer. "Will you buy your discharge?"

"Ah, no," he said. "That's impossible in these times. No; I came here against my will; why should I not escape? Now is the time, as we shall soon be striking camp, and I might see you no more. This is my scheme. I will ask you to meet me on the highway two miles off, on some calm night next week that may be appointed. There will be nothing unbecoming in it, or to cause you shame; you will not fly alone with me, for I will bring with me my devoted young friend Christoph, an Alsatian, who has lately joined the regiment, and who has agreed to assist in this enterprise. We shall have come from yonder harbour, where we shall have examined the boats, and found one suited to our purpose. Christoph has already a chart of the Channel, and we will then go to the harbour, and at midnight cut the boat from her moorings, and row away round the point out of sight; and by the next morning we are on the coast of France, near Cherbourg. The rest is easy, for I have saved money for the land journey, and can get a change of clothes. I will write to my mother, who will meet us on the way."

He added details in reply to her inquiries, which left no doubt in Phyllis's mind of the feasibility of the undertaking. But its magnitude almost appalled her; and it is questionable if she would ever have gone further in the wild adventure if, on entering the house that night, her father had not accosted her in the most significant terms.

"How about the York Hussars?" he said.

"They are still at the camp; but they are soon going away, I believe."

"It is useless for you to attempt to cloak your actions in that way. You have been meeting one of those fellows; you have been seen walking about with him—foreign barbarians, not much better than the French themselves! I have made up my mind—don't speak a word till I have done, please!—I have made up my mind that you shall stay here no longer while they are on the spot. You shall go to your aunt's."

It was useless for her to protest that she had never taken a walk with any soldier or man under the sun except himself. Her protestations were feeble, too, for though he was not literally correct in his assertion, he was virtually only half in error.

The house of her father's sister was a prison to Phyllis. She had quite recently undergone experience of its gloom; and when her father went on to direct her to pack what would be necessary for her to take, her heart died within her. In after years she never attempted to excuse her conduct during this week of agitation: but the result of her self-communing was that she decided to join in the scheme of her lover and his friend, and fly to the country which he had coloured with such lovely hues in her imagination. She always said that the one feature in his proposal which overcame her hesitation was the obvious purity and straightforwardness of his intentions. He showed himself to be so virtuous and kind; he treated her with a respect to which she had never before been accustomed; and she was braced to the obvious risks of the voyage by her confidence in him.

IV

It was on a soft, dark evening of the following week that they engaged in the adventure. Tina was to meet her at a point in the highway at which the lane to the village branched off. Christoph was to go ahead of them to the harbour where the boat lay, row it round the Nothe—or Look-out as it was called in those days—and pick them up on the other side of the promontory, which they were to reach by crossing the harbour-bridge on foot, and climbing over the Look-out hill.

As soon as her father had ascended to his room she left the house, and, bundle in hand, proceeded at a trot along the lane. At such an hour not a soul was afoot anywhere in the village, and she reached the junction of the lane with the highway unobserved. Here she took up her position in the obscurity formed by the angle of a fence, whence she could discern everyone who approached along the turnpike-road, without being herself seen.

She had not remained thus waiting for her lover longer than a minute—though from the tension of her nerves the lapse of even that short time was trying—when, instead of the expected footsteps, the stagecoach could be heard descending the hill. She knew that Tina would not show himself till the road was clear, and waited impatiently for the coach to pass. Nearing the corner where she was it slackened speed, and, instead of going by as usual, drew up within a few yards of her. A passenger alighted, and she heard his voice. It was Humphrey Gould's.

He had brought a friend with him, and luggage. The luggage was deposited on the grass, and the coach went on its route to the royal watering-place.

"I wonder where that young man is with the horse and trap?" said her former admirer to his companion. "I hope we shan't have to wait here long. I told him half-past nine o'clock precisely."

"Have you got her present safe?"

"Phyllis's? Oh, yes. It is in this trunk. I hope it will please her."

"Of course it will. What woman would not be pleased with such a handsome peace-offering?"

"Well—she deserves it. I've treated her rather badly. But she has been in my mind these last two days much more than I should care to confess to everybody. Ah, well; I'll say no more about that. It cannot be that she is so bad as they make out. I am quite sure that a girl of her good wit would know better than to get entangled with any of those Hanoverian soldiers. I won't believe it of her, and there's an end on't."

More words in the same strain were casually dropped as the two men waited; words which revealed to her, as by a sudden illumination, the enormity of her conduct. The conversation was at length cut off by the arrival of the man with the vehicle. The luggage was placed in it, and they mounted, and were driven on in the direction from which she had just come.

Phyllis was so conscience-stricken that she was at first inclined to follow them; but a moment's reflection led her to feel that it would only be bare justice to Matthäus to wait till he arrived, and explain candidly that she had changed her mind—difficult as the struggle would be when she stood face to face with him. She bitterly reproached herself for having believed reports which represented Humphrey Gould as false to his engagement, when, from what she now heard from his own lips, she gathered that he had been living full of trust in her. But she knew well enough who had won her love. Without him her life seemed a dreary prospect, yet the more she looked at his proposal the more she feared to accept it—so wild as it was, so vague, so venturesome. She had promised Humphrey Gould, and it was only his assumed faithlessness which had led her to treat that promise as nought. His solicitude in bringing her these gifts touched her; her promise must be kept, and esteem must take the place of love. She would preserve her self-respect. She would stay at home, and marry him, and suffer.

Phyllis had thus braced herself to an exceptional fortitude when, a few minutes later, the outline of Matthäus Tina appeared behind a field-gate, over which he lightly leapt as she stepped forward. There was no evading it, he pressed her to his breast.

"It is the first and last time!" she wildly thought as she stood encircled by his arms.

How Phyllis got through the terrible ordeal of that night she could never clearly recollect. She always attributed her success in carrying out her resolve to her lover's honour, for as soon as she declared to him in feeble words that she had changed her mind, and felt that she could not, dared not, fly with him, he forbore to urge her, grieved as he was at her decision. Unscrupulous pressure on his part, seeing how romantically she had become attached to him, would no doubt have turned the balance in his favour. But he did nothing to tempt her unduly or unfairly.

On her side, fearing for his safety, she begged him to remain. This, he declared, could not be. "I cannot break faith with my friend," said he. Had he stood alone he would have abandoned his plan. But Christoph, with the boat and compass and chart, was waiting on the shore; the tide would soon turn; his mother had been warned of his coming; go he must.

Many precious minutes were lost while he tarried, unable to tear himself away. Phyllis held to her resolve, though it cost her many a bitter pang. At last they parted, and he went down the hill. Before his footsteps had quite died away she felt a desire to behold at least his outline once more, and running noiselessly after him, regained view of his diminishing figure. For one moment she was sufficiently excited to be on the point of rushing forward and linking her fate with his. But she could not. The courage which at the critical instant failed Cleopatra of Egypt could scarcely be expected of Phyllis Grove.

A dark shape, similar to his own, joined him in the highway. It was Christoph, his friend. She could see no more; they had hastened on in the direction of the town and harbour, four miles ahead. With a feeling akin to despair she turned and slowly pursued her way homeward.

Tattoo sounded in the camp; but there was no camp for her now. It was as dead as the camp of the Assyrians after the passage of the Destroying Angel.

She noiselessly entered the house, seeing nobody, and went to bed. Grief, which kept her awake at first, ultimately wrapped her in a heavy sleep. The next morning her father met her at the foot of the stairs.

"Mr. Gould is come!" he said triumphantly.

Humphrey was staying at the inn, and had already called to inquire for her. He had brought her a present of a very handsome looking-glass in a frame of *repoussé* silverwork, which her father held in his hand. He had promised to call again in the course of an hour, to ask Phyllis to walk with him.

Pretty mirrors were rarer in country-houses at that day than they are now, and the one before her won Phyllis's admiration. She looked into it, saw how heavy her eyes were, and endeavoured to brighten them. She was in that wretched state of mind which leads a woman to move mechanically onward in what she conceives to be her allotted path. Mr. Humphrey had, in his undemonstrative way, been adhering all along to the old understanding; it was for her to do the same, and to say not a word of her own lapse. She put on her bonnet and tippet, and when he arrived at the hour named she was at the door awaiting him.

V

PHYLLIS thanked him for his beautiful gift; but the talking was soon entirely on Humphrey's side as they walked along. He told her of the latest movements of the world of fashion—a subject which she willingly discussed to the exclusion of anything more personal—and his measured language helped to still her disquieted heart and brain. Had not her own sadness been what it was she must have observed his embarrassment. At last he abruptly changed the subject.

"I am glad you are pleased with my little present," he said. "The truth is that I brought it to propitiate 'ee, and to get you to help me out of a mighty difficulty."

It was inconceivable to Phyllis that this independent bachelor—whom she admired in some respects—could have a difficulty.

"Phyllis—I'll tell you my secret at once; for I have a monstrous secret to confide before I can ask your counsel. The case is, then, that I am married: yes, I have privately married a dear young belle; and if you knew her, and I hope you will, you would say everything in her praise. But she is not quite the one that my father would have chose for me—you know the paternal idea as well as I—and I have kept it secret. There will be a terrible noise, no doubt; but I think that with your help I may get over it. If you would only do me this good turn—when I have told my father, I mean—say that you never could have married me, you know, or something of that sort—'pon my life it will help to smooth the way vastly. I am so anxious to win him round to my point of view, and not to cause any estrangement."

What Phyllis replied she scarcely knew, or how she counselled him as to his unexpected situation. Yet the relief that his announcement brought her was perceptible. To have confided her trouble in return was what her aching heart longed to do; and had Humphrey been a woman she would instantly have poured out her tale. But to him she feared to confess; and there was a real reason for silence, till a sufficient time had elapsed to allow her lover and his comrade to get out of harm's way.

As soon as she reached home again she sought a solitary place, and spent the time in half regretting that she had not gone away, and in dreaming over the meetings with Matthäus Tina from their beginning to their end. In his own country, amongst his own countrywomen, he would possibly soon forget her, even to her very name.

Her listlessness was such that she did not go out of the house for several days. There came a morning which broke in a fog and mist, behind which the dawn could be discerned in greenish grey; and the outlines of the tents, and the rows of horses at the ropes. The smoke from the canteen fires dropped heavily.

The spot at the bottom of the garden where she had been accustomed to climb the wall to meet Matthäus, was the only inch of English ground in which she took any interest; and in spite of the disagreeable haze prevailing she walked out there till she reached the well-known corner. Every blade of grass was weighted with little liquid globes, and slugs and snails had crept out upon the plots. She could hear the usual faint noises from the camp, and in the other direction the trot of farmers on the road to the town, for it was market-day. She observed that her frequent visits to this corner had quite trodden down the grass in the angle of the wall, and left marks of garden soil on the stepping-stones by which she had mounted to look over the top. Seldom having gone there till dusk, she had not considered that her traces might be visible by day. Perhaps it was these which had revealed her trysts to her father.

While she paused in melancholy regard, she fancied that the customary sounds from the tents were changing their character. Indifferent as Phyllis was to camp doings now, she mounted by the steps to the old place. What she beheld at first awed and perplexed her; then she stood rigid, her fingers hooked to the wall, her eyes staring out of her head, and her face as if hardened to stone.

On the open green stretching before her all the regiments in the camp were drawn up in line, in the mid-front of which two empty coffins lay on the ground. The unwonted sounds which she had noticed came from an advancing procession. It consisted of the band of the York Hussars playing a dead march; next two soldiers of that regiment in a mourning coach, guarded on each side, and accompanied by two priests. Behind came a crowd of rustics who had been attracted by the event. The melancholy procession marched along the front of the line, returned to the centre, and halted beside the coffins, where the two condemned men were blindfolded, and each placed kneeling on his coffin; a few minutes' pause was now given, while they prayed.

A firing-party of twenty-four men stood ready with levelled carbines. The commanding officer, who had his sword drawn, waved it through some cuts of the sword exercise till he reached the downward stroke, whereat the firing-party discharged their volley. The two victims fell, one upon his face across his coffin, the other backwards.

As the volley resounded there arose a shriek from the wall of Dr. Grove's garden, and someone fell down inside; but nobody among the spectators without noticed it at the time. The two executed Hussars were Matthäus Tina and his friend Christoph. The soldiers on guard placed the bodies in the coffins almost instantly; but the colonel of the regiment, an Englishman, rode up and exclaimed in a stern voice: "Turn them out—as an example to the men!"

The coffins were lifted endwise, and the dead Germans flung out upon their faces on the grass. Then all the regiments wheeled in sections, and marched past the spot in slow time. When the survey was over the corpses were again coffined, and borne away.

Meanwhile Dr. Grove, attracted by the noise of the volley, had rushed out into his garden, where he saw his wretched daughter lying motionless against the wall. She was taken indoors, but it was long before she recovered consciousness; and for weeks they despaired of her reason.

It transpired that the luckless deserters from the York Hussars had cut the boat from her moorings in the adjacent harbour, according to their plan, and, with two other comrades who were smarting under ill-treatment from their colonel, had sailed in safety across the Channel. But mistaking their bearings they steered into Jersey, thinking that island the French coast. Here they were perceived to be deserters, and delivered up to the authorities. Matthäus and Christoph interceded for the other two at the court-martial, saying that it was entirely by the former's representations that these were induced to go. Their sentence was accordingly commuted to flogging, the death punishment being reserved for their leaders.

The visitor to the well-known old Georgian watering-place, who may care to ramble to the neighbouring village under the hills, and examine the register of burials, will there find two entries in these words:

> Matth: Tina (Corpl.) in His Majesty's Regmt. of York Hussars, and Shot for Desertion, was Buried June 30th, 1801, aged 22 years. Born in the town of Saarbrück, Germany.
>
> Christoph Bless, belonging to His Majesty's Regmt. of York Hussars, who was Shot for Desertion, was Buried June 30th, 1801, aged 22 years. Born at Lothaargen, Alsatia.

Their graves were dug at the back of the little church, near the wall. There is no memorial to mark the spot, but Phyllis pointed it out to me. While she lived she used to keep their mounds neat: but now they are overgrown with nettles, and sunk nearly flat. The older villagers, however, who know the episode from their parents, still recollect the place where the soldiers lie. Phyllis lies near.

W. CLARK RUSSELL

(1844–1911)

WILLIAM CLARK RUSSELL was the son of Henry Russell, the author of "Cheer, Boys, Cheer!" He served in the Merchant Service between the ages of thirteen and twenty-one, when he turned to literature. Most of his novels are stories of the sea in the days of sailing-ships, and he wrote of these with expert knowledge. An early work was *John Holdsworth, Chief Mate* (1874), and among many others are *The Wreck of the Grosvenor* (1875), *An Ocean Tragedy* (1881), *List, Ye Landsmen!* (1897), and *The Yarn of Old Harbour Town* (1905). He also wrote biographies of Nelson, Dampier, and Collingwood.

"A Drunken Ship," from *Round the Galley Fire* (1883), is reprinted by kind permission of Messrs. Chatto and Windus.

A DRUNKEN SHIP

IN one of Edgar Poe's stories there is an account of a crew clinging to the bottom of their capsized vessel, and watching a ship approach them. She comes yawing and steering very wildly, but there are people aboard, and the poor sailors are full of hope; until on a sudden an insufferable smell is borne to them by the wind, and they discover that the figures lolling upon the ship's sides are putrifying corpses.

This tale of horror as well as of imagination came into my head some time ago, when I read the evidence that had been tendered in St. George's Hall, Liverpool, by a certain pier-manager and coxswain of the lifeboat belonging to a northwestern town. He said that at about half-past five in the morning he was roused out by a man who told him that there was a vessel drifting ashore. He hurried down to the beach, and saw a barque of between 300 and 400 tons a short distance off under lower topsails. There was a fresh breeze from the westward. He watched the vessel a few minutes, and perceived that she would sometimes fall off so as to bring the breeze on her quarter, and then round close to the wind, like Poe's dreadful ship, and that she was coming ashore as fast as ever she could drive. The lifeboat was launched when this strangely behaved barque was within a hundred and fifty fathoms of the beach, and on the boat getting alongside, a strong smell of rum and water was found to pervade the atmosphere. A man got on to the rail and dropped into the boat, and the coxswain said "he seemed stupefied, took no notice of anything, and did not speak." This was the skipper. The rest of the crew tumbled into the lifeboat and were conveyed ashore, while the barque took the ground and became a total wreck, nothing being saved but some sails and a few stores.

Such a very unusual circumstance as that of a well-found barque sailing ashore, as one might put it, of her own will, was sure to have a queer story behind it. And assuredly the story *is* a queer one, making one of the most disgraceful narratives to be found in the modern marine annals. It shall be told by a specimen of one of those plain, honest, English seamen who captains say are no longer to be found, and whose extinction, they declare, obliges them to ship "Dutchmen." I will not give this excellent man his name, glad as I should be to do so, for the punishment inflicted on the captain and mate by the court that inquired into their conduct would render a large public identification a needless supplementary penalty. The certificate of competency held by the captain has been cancelled, but to the mate there has been granted a twelve months' chance of reformation, and this alone should explain the reason for suppressing all names.

"The barque was a vessel of 340 tons, and we had a crew of ten men, not counting the captain and mate. We were bound for Quebec, which, I reckon, should make a ship's course about west by south; but on this, as you'll take note presently, all mariners don't seem to be agreed. The whole of the crew, saving me and another whose name shall be Bill, were drunk when the barque left Liverpool. Speaking of the fo'c's'le, I don't mean to say there's anything unusual in this. Drink's grown with legislation. In old times, when there was less law, there was less lush. It's a teetotal age, this; nothing but water going in vessels, and the consequence is that men newly shipped, knowing that there'll be no grog betwixt this and the next port, go in for a bout of drinking to serve them, as it might be, for the whole voyage. See 'em come aboard, sprawling and roaring, too sick to stand, rolling below, and leaving the ship to sail away with no one but the idlers—and them drunk, too, maybe—to do her work for twenty-four hours or longer. If I was an owner my ship shouldn't be a teetotaler. Every day, at noon, there should be a can of rum on the capstan for the men—a tot apiece; but I'd make this rule, that any man as came aboard in liquor should have no grog served out to him for the rest of the voyage. That would stop the drunkenness ships carry away from the ports, and all the dangers which a drunken crew brings on a vessel that's got to grope her way down rivers and along channels full of peril.

"Well, there was ten of us, and eight were drunk. I'm speaking of forrards; I'll come aft presently. I never saw men worse in liquor. You remember them Scotchmen that used to stand at tobacconists' doors, taking a pinch of snuff?—dummies they were, you'll recall. Well, think of giving one of 'em a shove, and seeing him fall. If ye can fix such an object in your imagination you'll comprehend the sort of helplessness of my eight shipmates. They lay in the fo'c's'le as lifeless as bits of timber; and this being the condition of the barque, we were towed out with a pilot aboard, and then, when abreast of the Nor'west Lightship, were left to shift for ourselves. The mate was aft, me at the wheel, and Bill forward. There was not an inch of canvas on our vessel, and no one on deck excepting those I've mentioned. Whilst we were towing, the mate came up to have a look at the compass now and again, and then I noticed that if he wasn't downright slewed he didn't want very many more nips to settle his business. He goes lurching along till he comes abreast of the main rigging, and here he lays hold and sings out, 'All hands make sail. Tumble up, my lively hearties! Bear a hand with your hair oil and your silk stockings, my sweet and noble fellows!'

"But nobody took any notice except Bill, who sings out, 'There's no tumbling up aboard this galliant vessel, sir—leastways, forrards; there's naught but tumbling down.' At which the mate bursts into a loud laugh, swaying upon the rope he had hold of as though he meant to swig off on it. Then, looking up and around, he sings out:

"'This ain't a steamer. The sails must be loosed and the yards hoisted, bully, if the Liverpool gells are ever to clap eyes on us brave mariners again; so jump below among them dreadful drunkards and rout 'em out. Rout 'em out, do you hear?'

"Well, Bill did as he was told, and after a bit he managed to shove two or three of the crew through the scuttle on to the deck. They stood blinkin' in the light like owls, rolling up against one another with their hair over their faces, and their clothes looking as if they had been put on upside down.

" 'Now, then! now, then!' sings out the mate, who couldn't keep his legs without holding on; 'what's the meaning of this here dissipation? There's no drink allowed aboard this tidy little ship. There's nothing but the teetotal lay to be found in this handsome hooker. Milk and water, my bully sailor lads! that's the tap if ever ye want to end as philosophers. Loose the fore-topmast staysail. Loose the spanker. Get the main-topmast staysail on her. Lay out, someone, and loose the inner jib.' And he rattled order after order as though he'd got a ship's company of fifty men to do his bidding.

"How the drunken fellows scraped through the job I'm sure I don't know. It was a bad lookout for us two sober men, but for the life of me I couldn't help laughing to watch the sailors Bill had managed to shove on deck go aloft. Talk of hanging on with your eyelids! Again and again I expected to see 'em all drop overboard; but I suppose their instincts for holding on were there, though their senses were gone, and the same mental henergy it was, no doubt, as enabled them to get the gaskets adrift and loose the lower topsails. When those sails were sheeted home—the jib, staysails, and spanker being already set—the drunken men refused to do any more work; they rolled over to the scuttle and disappeared, the mate looking on, but too intoxicated to act. The skipper all this while never showed himself. I asked the mate what course I was to steer.

" 'Course?' said he; 'why, keep the vessel's head followin' the jibboom, can't ye?'

" 'Easy enough,' says I; 'but where's the jibboom a-going?'

" 'No impudence!' he cries out. 'Smother me if I know what the British sailor's a-coming to. It's all drink and jaw nowadays. What's become of all the old, 'spectable, sober seamen?—tell me that, you terrapin.'

"There was no use arguing with a man who couldn't stand without holding on. I says, 'I'm not going to steer this barque all day—'specially as we seem bound to nowheres. My trick was up and out a long spell since.'

" 'And d'ye think,' says he, 'the vessel don't know her way without you? Hook it forrard, afore I skin yer.'

"I let go the wheel and walked forward. I looked behind me as I went, making sure that he'd take my place. But the deuce a bit. He was leaning against the rail, and shook his fist at me when I turned my head, and there was the barque without any one steering her, her fore and aft canvas full, but her topsails aback, and her whole company, saving two, so drunk as to be incapable. It was a good job that old Drainings was not so drunk as the others, otherwise we should have been obliged to light the galley fire and get ourselves supper. We were not disposed to take this job upon ourselves, so we hauled him on deck and gave him several buckets of water, which appeared to wash some of the fumes out of his intellects, and he then turned to—in a very staggering fashion, sartinly—and got us some tea, being scared by our threats to drown him out of hand if he didn't tend to our wants.

"Me and my mate hung about the deck forrard watching to see if the skipper showed himself, but he never appeared, which, taken along with the condition of the mate, made us suppose he was drunk too; but we couldn't have swore to this without getting a sight of him first. I says to Bill, 'Here's a pretty lookout. What's to be done? No one at the wheel; no one in charge; everybody drunk, and the night coming along.'

" 'There's nothing to be done,' answers Bill, 'except to turn in and take our chance. It won't do for us to take command of the barque. If there's to be a mess, let it find the skipper boss, not us. I don't want no magistrate's job, for one. We're but common sailors, and common sailors have but a poor chance now when it comes to law, and the fight's between them and the captain.'

"This was a middlin' sensible view; but still, life's life, and I couldn't quite see my way to turn in aboard a drifting ship, and take our chance of all going well throughout the night. So, calling old Drainings, who was getting his senses and beginning to understand the muddle we was all in, we lighted our pipes and had a long confab, the end of it being an agreement that the three of us should keep a lookout, turn and turn about. There was to be no steering—nothing but looking. Well, I kept the first lookout, and in all them hours I never see either the captain or the mate on deck. The breeze was small, and the ship lay steady enough, her topsails aback and her staysails drawing. Two or three steamers drove past, and I'm pretty sartin they'd have been into us if I hadn't taken the precaution to get the side lights over. Bill relieved me at six bells, we having settled for his turn to follow mine, so as to give Drainings time to sleep off the rest of the rum that worked in his system. When I went below the fo'c's'le was as hot as an oven, such a smell of liquor about as would have made you think yourself in a public-house, and all hands snoring so loud that you might have reckoned the barque was sailing ten miles an hour, and that noise the sound of the water rolling away from her stem. I turned in all standing, ready for whatever might happen, and fell asleep, and when I woke it was to the tune of a desperate hammering on deck. It was broad daylight, and, when I tumbled up, I found the mate beating the deck and bawling at the top of his voice, 'Up with ye, you drunken swine! up naked, every mother's son of you, and don't stop to dress!' he was roaring, filling up his meaning with more oaths than he had fingers and toes. He was just in the same condition he had been in all along, rolling and sprawling here and there, and fogging the air all about him with the smell o' spirits.

"Old Drainings was at the wheel, and I spied the captain aft, holding on to a backstay with one hand and shaking his other hand at Drainings, who grinned in his face. Though pretty near the whole ship's length was betwixt us, I easily saw that the captain was as drunk as his mate. By and by he turns his head and sings out for the mate to lay aft. The mate goes, and the skipper, fetching him a thumping whack on the back—meant for love and good fellowship—casts his arm around the other's neck, and down they tumble below, for another reviver, no doubt. Drainings left the wheel and came forrard.

" 'I can't help laughing at the old man,' says he. 'Never heerd such nonsense as he talks. But, all the same, what's to do?' says he. 'We shall be driving ashore if we don't mind. Have any of the men recovered?'

" 'I've not had time to see,' I answers, and I dropped down the fo'c's'le hatch to have a look. I stirred them as was on the deck with my foot and made some of them talk to me; but there was not one man among them as was of any use. They had not only come aboard steeped to the eyes in drink, but had brought a quantity of lush along with them, and two or three empty black bottles knocking about 'splained how it was that sleeping in all night hadn't made these scowbanks fit for duty.

"Well, I don't want to make an endless job of this yarn, or I'd give you the particulars of that day and the night as followed. By that time most of the men had recovered their senses, and me and Bill took care, as fast as ever we could get 'em to sit up and listen, to 'splain the quandary the vessel was in, and our danger. This sobered 'em quicker than water would have done. They came on deck and took a look around, and saw nobody at the wheel, no one in charge, and nothing on the barque but what we had made shift to hoist after the tug had left us.

"This was the afternoon of the third day. The weather looked dirty in the southwest, and shortly before five o'clock the wind breezed up hard. Luckily we was under small canvas. I says to the men, 'The best thing we can do is to haul down the staysails and heave her to. There's no telling where she's been drifting to all these days. No sights have been taken, the log never hove, no reckoning of any kind kept. Whether we're off England, Hireland, or Scotland I'm not going to calculate; but one thing I'm certain sure of, we shall be having one of them kingdoms close aboard of us before long; and so I reckon our business is to slow down this here drift as fur as we can, whilst we see if the captain means to take charge and sail the vessel to Quebec, or keep drunk and send us all to the bottom.'

"Everybody being agreeable, we hauled down the staysails and backed the foretopsail. There was no watches, the crew hadn't been divided; however, we formed ourselves into two gangs, and agreed to keep watch and watch till the morning; then, if things remained as they was, we arranged for some of us to go aft to the captain, and, if he refused to do his duty, to hoist a distress signal, and 'splain our situation to the first ship as came along. The deuce of it was, ye see, there was ne'er a man forrards as knew anything of navigation. Had we turned to and seized the skipper's instruments and charts they'd have been of no use to us. Well, next morning arrived, and found the barque still drifting and the weather as thick as mud in a wine-glass. All hands assembled, and we held a sort o' parliament, and then it was agreed that I and another should go aft and inquire of the captain what he meant by this conduct. 'Cordingly we lay aft, and going into the cabin found the mate lying there drunk, though not incapable. He asked us what we wanted; but we took no notice, pushing on to the captain's berth. We hammered on the door, but getting no answer opened it, and saw him lying sound asleep and kinder stupefied in his bunk. We laid hold of him and hauled till we'd roused him up.

" 'Captain,' says I, 'we've come aft to ask you what you mean to do with the barque. She's drifting anyhow, and all hands feel their lives to be in danger.'

" 'Pooh, pooh!' says he, stretching his arms and gaping, 'it's all right. Have a glass of grog?'

" 'No,' I says firmly, 'we don't want no grog. What we require is to know what you meant to do?'

"Instead of answering, he lay back, turned over and shut his eyes; so, seeing that there was no satisfaction to be got, we came away and went forrards again. The men were now thoroughly scared. They said they warn't going to stand skylarking of this kind, and if the captain didn't turn to and take charge and sail the ship back to Liverpool, they'd knock off work. I went aft once more with this message, but though I nearly dragged the captain out of his bed, I couldn't make him understand, nor even rouse him up. So I walked up to the mate and told him of the men's resolution.

" 'I don't care,' says he; 'it's no business of mine. I'm not going to do anything without the captain's orders.'

"We was in a regular fix. The weather was so thick that it would need a ship to come very close to make out any signal we might hoist; we none of us knew where we were, in what direction to steer, what to do with the barque if we took charge of her. Whilst we were debating, the mate came out, and orders us to square the yards.

" 'What for?' says the crew.

" 'Why, for Liverpool,' he answers.

"We turned to with a will, the mate standing at the cabin door looking at us. We held on E.S.E. till about midnight, when we spied a light on the port quarter, and the mate said it was the Chickens off the Calf o' Man. It proved to be nothing of the kind, but Morecambe Bay light. At daybreak the land was plain to be seen about four miles distant, and the captain, who was now on deck, gave orders for the helm to be put up to let her drive ashore, which she did, the lifeboat coming out when we was close on to the beach, and taking us all off. The first to drop into the boat was the skipper; he wasn't too drunk to do that.

"What d'ye say to this tale of the sea, sir? What'll the public think of merchant sailors after hearing it? Should you think proper to print it, I'll allow that there'll not be a landsman as won't reckon it an out-and-out twister, spun from the winch o' your own invention. But, that there may be no doubt about it, just add what the finding of the Court was as inquired into this business: 'Neither the master nor the mate attended properly to his duties in navigating the vessel. They were both under the influence of drink during the voyage. The vessel was not navigated with proper and seamanlike care. She was stranded owing to the utter neglect from drunkenness of both master and mate. The Court considered that this was about as gross a case as ever came before a court of inquiry, and found both master and mate grievously and wrongfully in default.'

"Mild enough, sir. Had the Court been aboard, you may take your oath they'd have drawed it considerably stronger."

R. L. STEVENSON

(1850–1894)

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON was from a very early age interested in letters. At the age of sixteen he wrote *The Pentland Rising*, and began to contribute to the magazines in Scotland and England. Beginning in 1876, he published a charming series of essays in the *Cornhill Magazine*. *Treasure Island* (1883), begun to amuse his young stepson, was a great popular success; and this he followed with *Kidnapped* (1886), *The Black Arrow* (1888), and *The Master of Ballantræ* (1889), all historical romances of adventure. His versatility is shown by the fantastic *New Arabian*

Nights (1882), the highly elaborated *Prince Otto* (1885), the gruesome *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886), what is generally regarded as his masterpiece, *Weir of Hermiston* (1896), and his delightful *Child's Garden of Verses* (1885).

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THE SIRE DE MALÉTROIT'S DOOR

DENIS DE BEAULIEU was not yet two-and-twenty, but he counted himself a grown man, and a very accomplished cavalier into the bargain. Lads were early formed in that rough, warfaring epoch; and when one has been in a pitched battle and a dozen raids, has killed one's man in an honourable fashion, and knows a thing or two of strategy and mankind, a certain swagger in the gait is surely to be pardoned. He had put up his horse with due care, and supped with due deliberation; and then, in a very agreeable frame of mind, went out to pay a visit in the grey of the evening. It was not a very wise proceeding on the young man's part. He would have done better to remain beside the fire or go decently to bed. For the town was full of the troops of Burgundy and England under a mixed command; and though Denis was there on safe-conduct, his safe-conduct was like to serve him little on a chance encounter.

It was September, 1429; the weather had fallen sharp; a flighty piping wind, laden with showers, beat about the township; and the dead leaves ran riot along the streets. Here and there a window was already lighted up; and the noise of men-at-arms making merry over supper within, came forth in fits and was swallowed up and carried away by the wind. The night fell swiftly; the flag of England, fluttering on the spire-top, grew ever fainter and fainter against the flying clouds—a black speck like a swallow in the tumultuous, leaden chaos of the sky. As the night fell the wind rose, and began to hoot under archways and roar amid the tree-tops in the valley below the town.

Denis de Beaulieu walked fast and was soon knocking at his friend's door; but though he promised himself to stay only a little while and make an early return, his welcome was so pleasant, and he found so much to delay him, that it was already long past midnight before he said good-bye upon the threshold. The wind had fallen again in the meanwhile; the night was as black as the grave; not a star, nor a glimmer of moonshine, slipped through the canopy of cloud. Denis was ill-acquainted with the intricate lanes of Château Landon; even by daylight he had found some trouble in picking his way; and in this absolute darkness he soon lost it altogether. He was certain of one thing only—to keep mounting the hill; for his friend's house lay at the lower end, or tail, of Château Landon, while the inn was up at the head, under the great church spire. With this clue to go upon he stumbled and groped forward, now breathing more freely in open places where there was a good slice of sky overhead, now feeling along the wall in stifling closes. It is an eerie and mysterious position to be thus submerged in opaque blackness in an almost unknown town. The silence is terrifying in its possibilities. The touch of cold window bars to the exploring hand startles the man like the touch of a toad; the inequalities of the pavement shake his heart into his mouth; a piece of denser darkness threatens an ambuscade or a chasm in the pathway; and where the air is brighter, the houses put on strange and bewildering appearances, as if to lead him farther from his way. For Denis, who had to regain his inn without attracting notice, there was real danger as well as mere discomfort in the walk; and he went warily and boldly at once, and at every corner paused to make an observation.

He had been for some time threading a lane so narrow that he could touch a wall with either hand, when it began to open out and go sharply downward. Plainly this lay no longer in the direction of his inn; but the hope of a little more light tempted him forward to reconnoitre. The lane ended in a terrace with a bartizan wall, which gave an outlook between high houses, as out of an embrasure, into the valley lying dark and formless several hundred feet below. Denis looked down, and could discern a few tree-tops waving and a single speck of brightness where the river ran across a weir. The weather was clearing up, and the sky had lightened, so as to show the outline of the heavier clouds and the dark margin of the hills. By the uncertain glimmer, the house on his left hand should be a place of some pretensions; it was surmounted by several pinnacles and turret-tops; the round stern of a chapel, with a fringe of flying buttresses, projected boldly from the main block; and the door was sheltered under a deep porch carved with figures and overhung by two long gargoyles. The windows of the chapel gleamed through their intricate tracery with a light as of many tapers, and threw out the buttresses and the peaked roof in a more intense blackness against the sky. It was plainly the hotel of some great family of the neighbourhood; and as it reminded Denis of a town house of his own at Bourges, he stood for some time gazing up at it and mentally gauging the skill of the architects and the consideration of the two families.

There seemed to be no issue to the terrace but the lane by which he had reached it; he could only retrace his steps, but he had gained some notion of his whereabouts, and hoped by this means to hit the main thoroughfare and speedily regain the inn. He was reckoning without that chapter of accidents which was to make this night memorable above all others in his career; for he had not gone back above a hundred yards before he saw a light coming to meet him, and heard loud voices speaking together in the echoing narrows of the lane. It was a party of men-at-arms going the night round with torches. Denis assured himself that they had all been making free with the wine-bowl, and were in no mood to be particular about safe-conducts or the niceties of chivalrous war. It was as like as not that they would kill him like a dog and leave him where he fell. The situation was inspiriting but nervous. Their own torches would conceal him from sight, he reflected; and he hoped that they would drown the noise of his footsteps with their own empty voices. If he were but silent and fleet, he might evade their notice altogether.

Unfortunately, as he turned to beat a retreat, his foot rolled upon a pebble; he fell against the wall with an ejaculation, and his sword rang loudly on the stones. Two or three voices demanded who went there—some in French, some in English; but Denis made no reply, and ran the faster down the lane. Once upon the terrace, he paused to look back. They still kept calling after him, and just then began to double the pace in pursuit, with a considerable clank of armour, and great tossing of the torchlight to and fro in the narrow jaws of the passage.

Denis cast a look around and darted into the porch. There he might escape observation, or—if that were too much to expect—was in a capital posture whether for parley or defence. So thinking, he drew his sword and tried to set his back against the door. To his surprise, it yielded behind his weight; and though he turned in a moment, continued to swing back on oiled and noiseless hinges, until it stood wide open on a black interior. When things fall out opportunely for the person concerned, he is not apt to be critical about the how or why, his own immediate personal convenience seeming a sufficient reason for the strangest oddities and revolutions in our sublunary things; and so Denis, without a moment's hesitation, stepped within and partly closed the door behind him to conceal his place of refuge. Nothing was further from his thoughts than to close it altogether; but for some inexplicable reason—perhaps by a spring or a weight—the ponderous mass of oak whipped itself out of his fingers and clanked to, with a formidable rumble and a noise like the falling of an automatic bar.

The round, at that very moment, debouched upon the terrace and proceeded to summon him with shouts and curses. He heard them ferreting in the dark corners; the stock of a lance even rattled along the outer surface of the door behind which he stood; but these gentlemen were in too high a humour to be long delayed, and soon made off down a corkscrew pathway which had escaped Denis's observation, and passed out of sight and hearing along the battlements of the town.

Denis breathed again. He gave them a few minutes' grace for fear of accidents, and then groped about for some means of opening the door and slipping forth again. The inner surface was quite smooth, not a handle, not a moulding, not a projection of any sort. He got his finger-nails round the edges and pulled, but the mass was immovable. He shook it, it was as firm as a rock. Denis de Beaulieu frowned and gave vent to a little noiseless whistle. What ailed the door? he wondered. Why was it open? How came it to shut so easily and so effectually after him? There was something obscure and underhand about all this that was little to the young man's fancy. It looked like a snare; and yet who could suppose a snare in such a quiet by-street and in a house of so prosperous and even noble an exterior? And yet—snare or no snare, intentionally or unintentionally—here he was, prettily trapped; and for the life of him he could see no way out of it again. The darkness began to weigh upon him. He gave ear; all was silent without, but within and close by he seemed to catch a faint sighing, a faint sobbing rustle, a little stealthy creak—as though many persons were at his side, holding themselves quite still, and governing even their respiration with the extreme of slyness. The idea went to his vitals with a shock, and he faced about suddenly as if to defend his life. Then, for the first time, he became aware of a light about the level of his eyes and at some distance in the interior of the house—a vertical thread of light, widening towards the bottom, such as might escape between two wings of arras over a doorway. To see anything was a relief to Denis; it was like a piece of solid ground to a man labouring in a morass; his mind seized upon it with avidity; and he stood staring at it and trying to piece together some logical conception of his surroundings. Plainly there was a flight of steps ascending from his own level to that of this illuminated doorway; and indeed he thought he could make out another thread of light, as fine as a needle and as faint as phosphorescence, which might very well be reflected along the polished wood of a handrail. Since he had begun to suspect that he was not alone, his heart had continued to beat with smothering violence, and an intolerable desire for action of any sort had possessed itself of his spirit. He was in deadly peril, he believed. What could be more natural than to mount the staircase, lift the curtain, and confront his difficulty at once? At least he would be dealing with something tangible; at least he would be no longer in the dark. He stepped slowly forward with outstretched hands, until his foot struck the bottom step; then he rapidly scaled the stairs, stood for a moment to compose his expression, lifted the arras and went in.

He found himself in a large apartment of polished stone. There were three doors; one on each of three sides; all similarly curtained with tapestry. The fourth side was occupied by two large windows and a great stone chimney-piece, carved with the arms of the Malétroits. Denis recognised the bearings, and was gratified to find himself in such good hands. The room was strongly illuminated; but it contained little furniture except a heavy table and a chair or two, the hearth was innocent of fire, and the pavement was but sparsely strewn with rushes clearly many days old.

On a high chair beside the chimney, and directly facing Denis as he entered, sat a little old gentleman in a fur tippet. He sat with his legs crossed and his hands folded, and a cup of spiced wine stood by his elbow on a bracket on the wall. His countenance had a strongly masculine cast; not properly human, but such as we see in the bull, the goat, or the domestic boar; something equivocal and wheedling, something greedy, brutal, and dangerous. The upper lip was inordinately full, as though swollen by a blow or a toothache; and the smile, the peaked eyebrows, and the small, strong eyes were quaintly and almost comically evil in expression. Beautiful white hair hung straight all round his head, like a saint's, and fell in a single curl upon the tippet. His beard and moustache were the pink of venerable sweetness. Age, probably in consequence of inordinate precautions, had left no mark upon his hands; and the Malétroit hand was famous. It would be difficult to imagine anything at once so fleshy and so delicate in design; the taper, sensual fingers were like those of one of Leonardo's women; the fork of the thumb made a dimpled protuberance when closed; the nails were perfectly shaped, and of a dead, surprising whiteness. It rendered his aspect tenfold more redoubtable, that a man with hands like these should keep them devoutly folded in his lap like a virgin martyr—that a man with so intense and startling an expression of face should sit patiently on his seat and contemplate people with an unwinking stare, like a god, or a god's statue. His quiescence seemed ironical and treacherous, it fitted so poorly with his looks.

Such was Alain, Sire de Malétroit.

Denis and he looked silently at each other for a second or two.

"Pray step in," said the Sire de Malétroit. "I have been expecting you all the evening."

He had not risen, but he accompanied his words with a smile, and a slight but courteous inclination of the head. Partly from the smile, partly from the strange musical murmur with which the Sire prefaced his observation, Denis felt a strong shudder of disgust go through his marrow. And what with disgust and honest confusion of mind, he could scarcely get words together in reply.

"I fear," he said, "that this is a double accident. I am not the person you suppose me. It seems you were looking for a visit; but for my part, nothing was further from my thoughts—nothing could be more contrary to my wishes—than this intrusion."

"Well, well," replied the old gentleman indulgently, "here you are, which is the main point. Seat yourself, my friend, and put yourself entirely at your ease. We shall arrange our little affairs presently."

Denis perceived that the matter was still complicated with some misconception, and he hastened to continue his explanations.

"Your door . . ." he began.

"About my door?" asked the other, raising his peaked eyebrows. "A little piece of ingenuity." And he shrugged his shoulders. "A hospitable fancy! By your own account, you were not desirous of making my acquaintance. We old people look for such reluctance now and then; and when it touches our honour, we cast about until we find some way of overcoming it. You arrive uninvited, but believe me, very welcome."

"You persist in error, sir," said Denis. "There can be no question between you and me. I am a stranger in this country-side. My name is Denis, damoiseau de Beaulieu. If you see me in your house, it is only——"

"My young friend," interrupted the other, "you will permit me to have my own ideas on that subject. They probably differ from yours at the present moment," he added with a leer, "but time will show which of us is in the right."

Denis was convinced he had to do with a lunatic. He seated himself with a shrug, content to wait the upshot; and a pause ensued, during which he thought he could distinguish a hurried gabbling as of prayer from behind the arras immediately opposite him. Sometimes there seemed to be but one person engaged, sometimes two; and the vehemence of the voice, low as it was, seemed to indicate either great haste or an agony of spirit. It occurred to him that this piece of tapestry covered the entrance to the chapel he had noticed from without.

The old gentleman meanwhile surveyed Denis from head to foot with a smile, and from time to time emitted little noises like a bird or a mouse, which seemed to indicate a high degree of satisfaction. This state of matters became rapidly insupportable; and Denis, to put an end to it, remarked politely that the wind had gone down.

The old gentleman fell into a fit of silent laughter, so prolonged and violent that he became quite red in the face. Denis got upon his feet at once, and put on his hat with a flourish.

"Sir," he said, "if you are in your wits, you have affronted me grossly. If you are out of them, I flatter myself I can find better employment for my brains than to talk with lunatics. My conscience is clear; you have made a fool of me from the first moment; you have refused to hear my explanations; and now there is no power under

God will make me stay here any longer; and if I cannot make my way out in a more decent fashion, I will hack your door in pieces with my sword."

The Sire de Malétroit raised his right hand and wagged it at Denis with the fore and little fingers extended.

"My dear nephew," he said, "sit down."

"Nephew!" retorted Denis, "you lie in your throat": and he snapped his fingers in his face.

"Sit down, you rogue!" cried the old gentleman, in a sudden, harsh voice, like the barking of a dog. "Do you fancy," he went on, "that when I had made my little contrivance for the door I had stopped short with that? If you prefer to be bound hand and foot till your bones ache, rise and try to go away. If you choose to remain a free young buck, agreeably conversing with an old gentleman--why, sit where you are in peace, and God be with you."

"Do you mean I am a prisoner?" demanded Denis.

"I state the facts," replied the other. "I would rather leave the conclusion to yourself."

Denis sat down again. Externally he managed to keep pretty calm; but within, he was now boiling with anger, now chilled with apprehension. He no longer felt convinced that he was dealing with a madman. And if the old gentleman was sane, what, in God's name, had he to look for? What absurd or tragical adventure had befallen him? What countenance was he to assume?

While he was thus unpleasantly reflecting, the arras that overhung the chapel door was raised, and a tall priest in his robes came forth and, giving a long, keen stare at Denis, said something in an undertone to Sire de Malétroit.

"She is in a better frame of spirit?" asked the latter.

"She is more resigned, messire," replied the priest.

"Now the lord help her, she is hard to please!" sneered the old gentleman. "A likely stripling—not ill-born—and of her own choosing, too? Why, what more would the jade have?"

"The situation is not usual for a young damsel," said the other, "and somewhat trying to her blushes."

"She should have thought of that before she began the dance. It was none of my choosing, God knows that: but since she is in it, by our lady, she shall carry it to the end." And then addressing Denis, "Monsieur de Beaulieu," he asked, "may I present you to my niece? She has been waiting your arrival, I may say, with even greater impatience than myself."

Denis had resigned himself with a good grace—all he desired was to know the worst of it as speedily as possible; so he rose at once, and bowed in acquiescence. The Sire de Malétroit followed his example and limped, with the assistance of the chaplain's arm, towards the chapel-door. The priest pulled aside the arras, and all three entered. The building had considerable architectural pretensions. A light groining sprang from six stout columns, and hung down in two rich pendants from the centre of the vault. The place terminated behind the altar in a round end, embossed and honeycombed with a superfluity of ornament in relief, and pierced by many little windows shaped like stars, trefoils, or wheels. These windows were imperfectly glazed, so that the night air circulated freely in the chapel. The tapers, of which there must have been half a hundred burning on the altar, were unmercifully blown about; and the light went through many different phases of brilliancy and semi-eclipse. On the steps in front of the altar knelt a young girl richly attired as a bride. A chill settled over Denis as he observed her costume; he fought with desperate energy against the conclusion that was being thrust upon his mind; it could not—it should not—be as he feared.

"Blanche," said the Sire, in his most flute-like tones, "I have brought a friend to see you, my little girl; turn round and give him your pretty hand. It is good to be devout; but it is necessary to be polite, my niece."

The girl rose to her feet and turned towards the new-comers. She moved all of a piece; and shame and exhaustion were expressed in every line of her fresh young body; and she held her head down and kept her eyes upon the pavement, as she came slowly forward. In the course of her advance, her eyes fell upon Denis de Beaulieu's feet—feet of which he was justly vain, be it remarked, and wore in the most elegant accoutrement even while travelling. She paused—started, as if his yellow boots had conveyed some shocking meaning—and glanced suddenly up into the wearer's countenance. Their eyes met; shame gave place to horror and terror in her looks; the blood left her lips; with a piercing scream she covered her face with her hands and sank upon the chapel floor.

"That is not the man!" she cried. "My uncle; that is not the man!"

The Sire de Malétroit chirped agreeably. "Of course not," he said, "I expected as much. It was so unfortunate you could not remember his name."

"Indeed," she cried, "indeed, I have never seen this person till this moment—I have never so much as set eyes upon him—I never wish to see him again. Sir," she said, turning to Denis, "if you are a gentleman, you will bear me out. Have I ever seen you—have you ever seen me—before this accursed hour?"

"To speak for myself, I have never had that pleasure," answered the young man. "This is the first time, messire, that I have met with your engaging niece."

The old gentleman shrugged his shoulders.

"I am distressed to hear it," he said. "But it is never too late to begin. I had little more acquaintance with my own late lady ere I married her; which proves," he added with a grimace, "that these impromptu marriages may often produce an excellent understanding in the long-run. As the bridegroom is to have a voice in the matter, I will give him two hours to make up for lost time before we proceed with the ceremony." And he turned towards the door, followed by the clergyman.

The girl was on her feet in a moment. "My uncle, you cannot be in earnest," she said. "I declare before God I will stab myself rather than be forced on that young man. The heart rises at it; God forbids such marriages; you dishonour your white hair. Oh, my uncle, pity me! There is not a woman in all the world but would prefer death to such a nuptial. Is it possible," she added, faltering, "is it possible that you do not believe me—that you still think this"—and she pointed at Denis with a tremor of anger and contempt—"that you still think *this* to be the man?"

"Frankly," said the old gentleman, pausing on the threshold, "I do. But let me explain to you once for all, Blanche de Malétroit, my way of thinking about this affair. When you took it into your head to dishonour my family and the name that I have borne, in peace and war, for more than threescore years, you forfeited, not only the right to question my designs, but that of looking me in the face. If your father had been alive, he would have spat on you and turned you out of doors. His was the hand of iron. You may bless your God you have only to deal with the hand of velvet, mademoiselle. It was my duty to get you married without delay. Out of pure goodwill, I have tried to find your own gallant for you. And I believe I have succeeded. But before God and all the holy angels, Blanche de Malétroit, if I have not, I care not one jackstraw. So let me recommend you to be polite to our young friend; for upon my word, your next groom may be less appetising."

And with that he went out, with the chaplain at his heels; and the arras fell behind the pair.

The girl turned upon Denis with flashing eyes.

"And what, sir," she demanded, "may be the meaning of all this?"

"God knows," returned Denis gloomily. "I am a prisoner in this house, which seems full of mad people. More I know not; and nothing do I understand."

"And pray how came you here?" she asked.

He told her as briefly as he could. "For the rest," he added, "perhaps you will follow my example, and tell me the answer to all these riddles, and what, in God's name, is like to be the end of it."

She stood silent for a little, and he could see her lips tremble and her tearless eyes burn with a feverish lustre. Then she pressed her forehead in both hands.

"Alas, how my head aches!" she said wearily, "to say nothing of my poor heart! But it is due to you to know my story, unmaidenly as it must seem. I am called Blanche de Malétroit: I have been without father or mother for—oh! for as long as I can recollect, and indeed I have been most unhappy all my life. Three months ago a young captain began to stand near me every day in church. I could see that I pleased him; I am much to blame, but I was so glad that anyone should love me; and when he passed me a letter, I took it home with me and read it with great pleasure. Since that time he has written many. He was so anxious to speak with me, poor fellow! and kept asking me to leave the door open some evening that we might have two words upon the stair. For he knew how much my uncle trusted me." She gave something like a sob at that, and it was a moment before she could go on. "My uncle is a hard man, but he is very shrewd," she said at last. "He has performed many feats in war, and was a great person at court, and much trusted by Queen Isabeau in old days. How he came to suspect me I cannot tell; but it is hard to keep anything from his knowledge; and this morning, as we came from mass, he took my hand in his, forced it open, and read my little billet, walking by my side all the while. When he had finished, he gave it back to me with great politeness. It contained another request to have the door left open; and this has been the ruin of us all. My uncle kept me strictly in my room until evening, and then ordered me to dress myself as you see me—a hard mockery for a young girl, do you not think so? I suppose, when he could not prevail with me to tell him the young captain's name, he must have laid a trap for him: into which, alas! you have fallen in the anger of God. I looked for much confusion; for how could I tell whether he was willing to take me for his wife on these sharp terms? He might have been trifling with me from the first; or I might have made myself too cheap in his eyes. But truly I had not looked for such a shameful punishment as this! I could not think that God would let a girl be so disgraced before a young man. And now I have told you all; and I can scarcely hope that you will not despise me."

Denis made her a respectful inclination.

"Madam," he said, "you have honoured me by your confidence. It remains for me to prove that I am not unworthy of the honour. Is Messire de Malétroit at hand?"

"I believe he is writing in the salle without," she answered.

"May I lead you thither, madam?" asked Denis, offering his hand with his most courtly bearing.

She accepted it; and the pair passed out of the chapel, Blanche in a very drooping and shamefast condition, but Denis strutting and ruffling in the consciousness of a mission, and the boyish certainty of accomplishing it with honour.

The Sire de Malétroit rose to meet them with an ironical obeisance.

"Sir," said Denis, with the grandest possible air, "I believe I am to have some say in the matter of this marriage; and let me tell you at once, I will be no party to forcing the inclination of this young lady. Had it been freely offered to me, I should have been proud to accept her hand, for I perceive she is as good as she is beautiful; but as things are, I have now the honour, messire, of refusing."

Blanche looked at him with gratitude in her eyes; but the old gentleman only smiled and smiled, until his smile grew positively sickening to Denis.

"I am afraid," he said, "Monsieur de Beaulieu, that you do not perfectly understand the choice I have to offer you. Follow me, I beseech you, to this window." And he led the way to one of the large windows which stood open on the night. "You observe," he went on, "there is an iron ring in the upper masonry, and reeved through that a very efficacious rope. Now, mark my words: if you should find your disinclination to my niece's person insurmountable, I shall have you hanged out of this window before sunrise. I shall only proceed to such an extremity with the greatest regret, you may believe me. For it is not at all your death that I desire, but my niece's establishment in life. At the same time, it must come to that if you prove obstinate. Your family, Monsieur de Beaulieu, is very well in its way; but if you sprang from Charlemagne, you should not refuse the hand of a Malétroit with impunity—not if she had been as common as the Paris road—not if she were as hideous as the gargoyle over my door. Neither my niece nor you, nor my own private feelings, move me at all in this matter. The honour of my house has been compromised; I believe you to be the guilty person; at least you are now in the secret; and you can hardly wonder if I request you to wipe out the stain. If you will not, your blood be on your own head! It will be no great satisfaction to me to have your interesting relics kicking their heels in the breeze below my windows; but half a loaf is better than no bread, and if I cannot cure the dishonour, I shall at least stop the scandal."

There was a pause.

"I believe there are other ways of settling such imbroglios among gentlemen," said Denis. "You wear a sword, and I hear you have used it with distinction."

The Sire de Malétroit made a signal to the chaplain, who crossed the room with long silent strides and raised the arras over the third of the three doors. It was only a moment before he let it fall again; but Denis had time to see a dusky passage full of armed men.

"When I was a little younger, I should have been delighted to honour you, Monsieur de Beaulieu," said Sire Alain; "but I am now too old. Faithful retainers are the sinews of age, and I must employ the strength I have. This is one of the hardest things to swallow as a man grows up in years; but with a little patience, even this becomes habitual. You and the lady seem to prefer the salle for what remains of your two hours; and as I have no desire to cross your preference, I shall resign it to your use with all the pleasure in the world. No haste!" he added, holding up his hand, as he saw a dangerous look come into Denis de Beaulieu's face. "If your mind revolts against hanging, it will be time enough two hours hence to throw yourself out of the window or upon the pikes of my retainers. Two hours of life are always two hours. A great many things may turn up in even as little a while as that. And, besides, if I understand her appearance, my niece has still something to say to you. You will not disfigure your last hours by a want of politeness to a lady?"

Denis looked at Blanche, and she made him an imploring gesture.

It is likely that the old gentleman was hugely pleased at this symptom of an understanding; for he smiled on both, and added sweetly: "If you will give me your word of honour, Monsieur de Beaulieu, to await my return at the end of the two hours before attempting anything desperate. I shall withdraw my retainers, and let you speak in greater privacy with mademoiselle."

Denis again glanced at the girl, who seemed to beseech him to agree.

"I give you my word of honour," he said.

Messire de Malétroit bowed, and proceeded to limp about the apartment, clearing his throat the while with that odd musical chirp which had already grown so irritating in the ears of Denis de Beaulieu. He first possessed himself of some papers which lay upon the table; then he went to the mouth of the passage and appeared to give an order to the men behind the arras; and lastly, he hobbled out through the door by which Denis had come in, turning upon the threshold to address a last smiling bow to the young couple, and followed by the chaplain with a hand-lamp.

No sooner were they alone than Blanche advanced towards Denis with her hands extended. Her face was flushed and excited, and her eyes shone with tears.

"You shall not die!" she cried, "you shall marry me after all."

"You seem to think, madam," replied Denis, "that I stand much in fear of death."

"Oh, no, no," she said, "I see you are no poltroon. It is for my own sake—I could not bear to have you slain for such a scruple."

"I am afraid," returned Denis, "that you underrate the difficulty, madam. What you may be too generous to refuse, I may be too proud to accept. In a moment of noble feeling towards me, you forgot what you perhaps owe to others."

He had the decency to keep his eyes upon the floor as he said this, and after he had finished, so as not to spy upon her confusion. She stood silent for a moment, then walked suddenly away, and falling on her uncle's chair, fairly burst out sobbing. Denis was in the acme of embarrassment. He looked round, as if to seek for inspiration, and seeing a stool, plumped down upon it for something to do. There he sat, playing with the guard of his rapier, and wishing himself dead a thousand times over, and buried in the nastiest kitchen-heap in France. His eyes wandered round the apartment, but found nothing to arrest them. There were such wide spaces between the furniture, the light fell so badly and cheerlessly over all, the dark outside air looked in so coldly through the windows, that he thought he had never seen a church so vast, nor a tomb so melancholy. The regular sobs of Blanche de Malétroit measured out the time like the ticking of a clock. He read the device upon the shield over and over again, until his eyes became obscured; he stared into shadowy corners until he imagined they were swarming with horrible animals; and every now and again he awoke with a start, to remember that his last two hours were running, and death was on the march.

Oftener and oftener, as the time went on, did his glance settle on the girl herself. Her face was bowed forward and covered with her hands, and she was shaken at intervals by the convulsive hiccup of grief. Even thus she was not an unpleasant object to dwell upon, so plump and yet so fine, with a warm brown skin, and the most beautiful hair, Denis thought, in the whole world of womankind. Her hands were like her uncle's; but they were more in place at the end of her young arms, and looked infinitely soft and caressing. He remembered how her blue eyes had shone upon him, full of anger, pity, and innocence. And the more he dwelt on her perfections, the uglier death looked, and the more deeply was he smitten with penitence at her continued tears. Now he felt that no man could have the courage to leave a world which contained so beautiful a creature; and now he would have given forty minutes of his last hour to have unsaid his cruel speech.

Suddenly a hoarse and ragged peal of cockcrow rose to their ears from the dark valley below the windows. And this shattering noise in the silence of all around was like a light in a dark place, and shook them both out of their reflections.

"Alas, can I do nothing to help you?" she said, looking up.

"Madam," replied Denis, with a fine irrelevancy, "if I have said anything to wound you, believe me, it was for your own sake and not for mine."

She thanked him with a tearful look.

"I feel your position cruelly," he went on. "The world has been bitter hard on you. Your uncle is a disgrace to mankind. Believe me, madam, there is no young gentleman in all France but would be glad of my opportunity, to die in doing you a momentary service."

"I know already that you can be very brave and generous," she answered. "What I *want* to know is whether I can serve you—now or afterwards," she added, with a quaver.

"Most certainly," he answered with a smile. "Let me sit beside you as if I were a friend, instead of a foolish intruder; try to forget how awkwardly we are placed to one another; make my last moments go pleasantly; and you will do me the chief service possible."

"You are very gallant," she added, with a yet deeper sadness . . . "very gallant . . . and it somehow pains me. But draw nearer, if you please; and if you find anything to say to me, you will at least make certain of a very friendly listener. Ah! Monsieur de Beaulieu," she broke forth, "ah! Monsieur de Beaulieu, how can I look you in the face?" And she fell to weeping again with a renewed diffusion.

"Madam," said Denis, taking her hand in both of his, "reflect on the little time I have before me, and the great bitterness into which I am cast by the sight of your distress. Spare me, in my last moments, the spectacle of what I cannot cure even with the sacrifice of my life."

"I am very selfish," answered Blanche. "I will be braver, Monsieur de Beaulieu, for your sake. But think if I can do you no kindness in the future—if you have no friends to whom I could carry your adieux. Charge me as heavily as you can; every burden will lighten, by so little, the invaluable gratitude I owe you. Put it in my power to do something more for you than weep."

"My mother is married again, and has a young family to care for. My brother Guichard will inherit my fiefs; and if I am not in error, that will content him amply for my death. Life is a little vapour that passeth away, as we are told by those in holy orders. When a man is in a fair way and sees all life open in front of him, he seems to himself to make a very important figure in the world. His horse whinnies to him; the trumpets blow and the girls look out of window as he rides into town before his company; he receives many assurances of trust and regard—sometimes by express in a letter—sometimes face to face, with persons of great consequence falling on his neck. It is not wonderful if his head is turned for a time. But once he is dead, were he as brave as Hercules or as wise as Solomon, he is soon forgotten. It is not ten years since my father fell, with many other knights around him, in a very fierce encounter, and I do not think that any one of them, nor so much as the name of the fight is now remembered. No, no, madam, the nearer you come to it, you see that death is a dark and dusty corner, where a man gets into his tomb and has the door shut after him till the judgment day. I have few friends just now, and once I am dead I shall have none."

"Ah, Monsieur de Beaulieu!" she exclaimed, "you forget Blanche de Malétroit."

"You have a sweet nature, madam, and you are pleased to estimate a little service far beyond its worth."

"It is not that," she answered. "You mistake me if you think I am so easily touched by my own concerns. I say so, because you are the noblest man I have ever met; because I recognise in you a spirit that would have made even a common person famous in the land."

"And yet here I die in a mousetrap—with no more noise about it than my own squeaking," answered he.

A look of pain crossed her face, and she was silent for a little while. Then a light came into her eyes, and with a smile she spoke again.

"I cannot have my champion think meanly of himself. Anyone who gives his life for another will be met in Paradise by all the heralds and angels of the Lord God. And you have no such cause to hang your head. For . . . pray, do you think me beautiful?" she asked, with a deep flush.

"Indeed, madam, I do," he said.

"I am glad of that," she answered heartily. "Do you think there are many men in France who have been asked in marriage by a beautiful maiden—with her own lips—and who have refused her to her face? I know you men would half despise such a triumph; but believe me, we women know more of what is precious in love. There is nothing that should set a person higher in his own esteem; and we women would prize nothing more dearly."

"You are very good," he said; "but you cannot make me forget that I was asked in pity and not for love."

"I am not so sure of that," she replied, holding down her head. "Hear me to an end, Monsieur de Beaulieu. I know how you must despise me; I feel you are right to do so; I am too poor a creature to occupy one thought of your mind, although, alas! you must die for me this morning. But when I asked you to marry me, indeed, and indeed, it was because I respected and admired you, and loved you with my whole soul, from the very moment that you took my part against my uncle. If you had seen yourself, and how noble you looked, you would pity rather than despise me. And now," she went on, hurriedly checking him with her hand, "although I have laid aside all reserve and told you so much, remember that I know your sentiments towards me already. I would not, believe me, being nobly born, weary you with importunities into consent. I too have a pride of my own: and I declare before the holy mother of God, if you should now go back from your word already given, I would no more marry you than I would marry my uncle's groom."

Denis smiled a little bitterly.

"It is a small love," he said, "that shies at a little pride."

She made no answer, although she probably had her own thoughts.

"Come hither to the window," he said, with a sigh. "Here is the dawn."

And indeed the dawn was already beginning. The hollow of the sky was full of essential daylight, colourless and clean; and the valley underneath was flooded with a grey reflection. A few thin vapours clung in the coves of the forest or lay along the winding course of the river. The scene disengaged a surprising effect of stillness, which was hardly interrupted when the cocks began once more to crow among the steadings. Perhaps the same fellow who had made so horrid a clangour in the darkness not half an hour before, now sent up the merriest cheer to greet the coming day. A little wind went bustling and eddying among the tree-tops underneath the windows. And still the daylight kept flooding insensibly out of the east, which was soon to grow incandescent and cast up that red-hot cannon-ball, the rising sun.

Denis looked out over all this with a bit of a shiver. He had taken her hand, and retained it in his almost unconsciously.

"Has the day begun already?" she said; and then, illogically enough: "the night has been so long! Alas! what shall we say to my uncle when he returns?"

"What you will," said Denis, and he pressed her fingers in his.

She was silent.

"Blanche," he said, with a swift, uncertain, passionate utterance, "you have seen whether I fear death. You must know well enough that I would as gladly leap out of that window into the empty air as lay a finger on you without your free and full consent. But if you care for me at all do not let me lose my life in a misapprehension; for I love you better than the whole world; and though I will die for you blithely, it would be like all the joys of Paradise to live on and spend my life in your service."

As he stopped speaking, a bell began to ring loudly in the interior of the house; and a clatter of armour in the corridor showed that the retainers were returning to their post, and the two hours were at an end.

"After all that you have heard?" she whispered, leaning towards him with her lips and eyes.

"I have heard nothing," he replied.

"The captain's name was Florimond de Champdivers," she said in his ear.

"I did not hear it," he answered, taking her supple body in his arms and covered her wet face with kisses.

A melodious chirping was audible behind, followed by a beautiful chuckle, and the voice of Messire de Malétroit wished his new nephew a good morning.

G. B. BURGIN

(1856–)

GEORGE B. BURGIN is novelist, critic, and journalist. He went as private secretary to Baker Pasha and accompanied him to Asia Minor as secretary of the Reform Committee in Armenia, returning to England in 1885. As he is famous as "the hero of a hundred books," there is nothing more to say of him here than that he is an excellent story-teller and a delightful after-dinner speaker.

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THE BRETHREN AND PRISCILLA

THE Brethren were unhappy.

Why?

There was little need to ask the question at any great length. Priscilla knew why.

Here were these twelve good men and true. Old an you will, but still stout of limb and of approved bearing. Under the presidency of the Master, they met together every morning at the time-worn chapel, and sat in oaken stalls as he prayed that they might face Death becomingly, or petitioned heaven that the soul of their Founder, brave Sir Simon of Sudeleye, might not be perturbed by visions of enemies slain in single combat in those good old days when it was accounted no sin to kill a man in open battle, but rather a virtue which should reckon towards the wiping out of a warrior's peccadilloes. The Brethren congregated together each morn and eve, clad in dark grey cloth gowns. Every man of them wore upon his left arm a massive silver badge surmounted by an ape rampant. As they solemnly sat in their oaken stalls and prayed for the soul of St. Simon, and each turned over his vellum-bound Bible, the thought occurred to them that it would be a neighbourly but slightly difficult thing to pray for Priscilla also. Why did she sit almost within the gates and burden their days with insults? The eighty pounds a year, the two oak-panelled rooms, the ingle-nook of the old kitchen, where above each ancient's seat was ranged a flagon of burnished copper—all these Priscilla contended were stolen from her. She had a right to one of the twelve flagons, one of the seats, one of the stipends, one of the oaken stalls, one of the vellum-bound Bibles, one of the little plots of garden, the produce of which each aged digger, when he did any work (of a verity this was but seldom), was compelled by the Hospital statutes to share with the Master. In short one twelfth of every morsel of bread which was consumed in the Hospital Priscilla claimed to be her due. She also clamoured for many other pleasant rights and privileges; and, what was worse, not content with relating how these old soldiers were robbing her, she flaunted forth her grievances to the visitors who came from five parishes round to view the Hospital gates and gaze upon the ancient men. Priscilla was a thorn—an abiding thorn, a very prickly thorn—in the flesh of these time-worn warriors, who wanted to live in peace, and sit and tell tales of the many battles they had won, when only the gleam of the fire in the ingle-nook lit up the massive beamed ceiling of Spanish chestnut or embroidered verses on the wall—verses worked by the white hands of fair Agnes Sudeleye before she took the veil, and for ever renounced such harmless vanities as silken mimicry of flower and rush and weed of the lovely Warwickshire lanes and meadows.

The Brethren could not look out from their dormer-windows at morn without seeing Priscilla's shrewish face over the way. If they wandered beneath the old pollarded limes in the garden Priscilla overlooked them still, or came out with grievous mock and gibe from behind the ancient nilometer which marked the boundary between the kitchen-garden, and the Master's pansy-speckled grass plot! According to the statutes of the Foundation, they were "twelve impotent men, disabled and decayed in the service of their country, and not possessed of more than five pounds a year." Fifteen hundred was the date of their Foundation. Over the right pillar of the ancient gateway climbed an entwined scroll with "Praise ye the Lord" written in fair characters; on the left side "Peace be to this house." And yet Priscilla disregarded these holy words; there was no peace. Priscilla was a woman with a grievance, which perhaps accounted for her persistent ill-behaviour, her flouting demeanour, and caustic tongue.

But although Priscilla had a grievance, she was not uncomely to gaze upon. Not uncomely, that is, to old soldiers who had settled down afar from grim scenes of war to fight their battles over again, and empty the ancient copper tankards with friendly persistence every eve. Priscilla's mouth upturned outwardly at the corners, and her lips were rather thin, thus betokening a somewhat shrewish disposition. But Priscilla was comparatively young. Forty summers had passed over her brow, and each succeeding summer had deepened slightly the horizontal wrinkles which marred its even whiteness. Priscilla's eyes had once been likened to the hue of the speedwell; but that was many years ago. Now they were somewhat like the self-same flower after a storm, when the colour is faded, weak, and watery. Sorrow had washed the blue from out their depths. At times they were (provided Priscilla did not think of the Brethren and their many iniquities) lucent and clear. In person she was tall, with a not unbecoming amplitude of form. Only the active mind of Priscilla prevented her form from becoming more buxom still. Her hair was lustrous red, with here and there the glossy tinge of a newly shelled chestnut. And her complexion was marvellously fair. For thirty years Priscilla had rubbed her face with a slice of raw potato when retiring to rest. This homely preservative had given it the delicacy and freshness of a child's. Her attire was demurely, menacingly sober. She attended church once a week, and sat within the Hospital gates to deride the ancient men every morn when they came forth to pray. Priscilla's reproaches robbed prayers of reality; they did not float to Heaven, but came heavily to earth again, as if mere lip petitions, borne only of custom and not of heart.

Of these ancient warriors of the Hospital there were but three unmarried—three without the Warden, who, being eighty-five and a bookworm, was not likely to change his estate. Nine women dwelt within the Hospital walls, in oaken-panelled, low-ceiled chambers, through the diamond lattices of which came the scents of sweet old-fashioned marjoram and thyme, of southernwood and lavender. And these nine women hated Priscilla in that she sat within the Hospital gates to mock at their good men, until they found no pleasure in the spring, but bowed beneath her bitter scorn.

When summer wooed the land, and the cuckoo's wandering voice made mellow music for the ears of the ancient men, there came a tide in their affairs which troubled them greatly. Priscilla fell ill. No more she flouted the ancients as they crawled out to bask in the sun; no more she made bitter jest and biting jeer at their sombre habiliments. The great desire to dwell once more within the Hospital had gotten hold of Priscilla and was eating her life away.

Then these ancient Brethren took magnanimous counsel together for the relief of their foe. They sat within the ingle-nook, before every man his churchwarden and copper tankard of ale. The ruddy flames cast shadows on each battle-worn face, lined and seamed and furrowed with scars. Some of their forms were bent and bowed almost double with the weight of many honourable adventures; some of their noses rivalled the ruby in hue; but one man there was "blue-eyed as is the morn," of stature tall, and a disposition savouring somewhat of youthful giddiness. This amorous ancient was yclept Martin Adale. Martin Adale was the Benjamin of the Brethren, their youngest, their bravest, their best-beloved, who had received more wounds in battle and slain more foes than all the others put together; and now, with three bullets in him, to which he afforded space and lodgement free, was come to lay his bones among them, weary and worn with service, and yet with a keen eye for a pretty lass or comely dame.

As they sat there, within the ingle-nook, the souls of the Brethren were heavy within them, inasmuch as their enemy was sick and like to die. And though many a time and oft these ancients had spitted foes in battle with as little remorse as a schoolboy experiences when pinioning a cockchafer, yet were they reluctant to stain their souls with the death of Mistress Priscilla, whose wormwood tongue had bitten them so oft. For when the father of Mistress Priscilla, an ancient and honourable soldier, had given up his soul to his Maker, then, according to the statutes of the Founder, Priscilla had been turned away from the Hospital to live or starve as best she might. "Twelve impotent men, disabled and decayed in the service of their country," ran the old statute. Priscilla had been cast out from the Hospital to fare forth into the world—cast out from the pleasant garden her soul loved—cast out from beneath the roof where swallows twittered under the eaves, and nightingales in the old limes sang that song of woe which has witched the world since the beginning of time.

Mathew Brant, the patriarch of them all, was first to give sorrow words. "We be old and honourable men, my masters," said he. "We be old and honourable men, my masters, comely and passing well favoured, men of conscience and eighty pounds income; yet a woman lieth in sore need, and we have caused her bane. What say you, Finicking John?"

Finicking John drained his huge flagon, and set it down with a sigh.

"Women be kittle folk," quoth he, "as empty as this tankard; as frothy when it's filled; and she hath harried us sorely."

"Tut, tut, man!" broke in Simon of Chalfont, "we be but sorry fagots to mind the sting of a woman's tongue. No sting, no honey."

"Better the honey of her lips, old friends," laughed ruddy William Joyland, of Cloverdale. "The lass is grievous sick and like to die."

Then solemnly uprose Mathew Brant, with a flourish of his crutch.

"We be old and honourable men, my masters," he piped, "old and honourable men, of some slight substance, and nine of us married withal, which also indicateth our valour. And we who be married men, having once entered into that state, are therefore unable to help the maid. Sad is her soul, and sick with hungry longing for the old home. We have driven her forth, and one of us, one of three, must bring her back again with mirthful music, the playing of pipes, and strow flowers in her path, so that the woman may be healed of her woe and not die."

A shadow fell upon the faces of them all, for these three unmarried men were light of heart and tongue. But those who had married were of more chastened mien; their good dames held them in due subjection; they rose when the clock struck ten, and marched solemnly away to the low-ceiled rooms of their wives. Each ancient might marry and bring his wife or daughter within the Hospital, yet was it accounted an unseemly thing to do, inasmuch as a man who is dependent on the bounty of a great soul gone before is loth to share that bounty with a woman who must needs be driven forth when his body is given to the worms for them to make thereof a mouldy feast. And Martin Adale, Finicking John, and Simon of Chalfont told merry tales and brave when the married men had gone away to their couches. Therefore it was a grievous thing for this triumvirate to listen to—a thing not to be encouraged, unless the maid's extremity would brook no other cure than that she must marry a valorous ancient, and so be restored to her old home.

But Mathew Brant, a stubborn and resolute man withal, would brook no delay.

"Here be three straws within mine hand, good masters," he mocked. "Come forth my merry men—come forth, and win a bride. Mistress Priscilla is not uncomely; and if her hand be as light as her tongue, and she recover, then are good days in store for one of ye. Hearten up, mine ancients—hearten up, ye who fear a woman's mouth more than the cannon's."

"I' faith," grumbled Simon of Chalfont, "'tis an affair of straw altogether; ofttimes there be powder enow and to spare at both. Have at it, brave Master Brant. I am no coward to flee from a woman's tongue."

"Peace, braggart," said Finicking John. "The maid hath a comely face and a persistent mind—like most women when set. Have at it also." And he drew the first straw.

Simon, with a laugh, came sheepishly forward, and drew the second.

"Give me the third, good Master Brant," quoth Master Adale. "For fifty years hath Dame Fortune smiled on me, and I would fain marry in my old age. Give me the straw, say I. I was the last to come here, and it is fitting I should marry Mistress Priscilla if Fate wills it so. She would burnish my copper tankard bravely."

"The shortest straw winneth the longest tongue for forty miles round," said old Mathew Brant. "Your straws, comrades; but pledge a draught—a deep, deep draught—ere our brother goeth to his doom."

The Brethren struggled to their feet, and pledged the expectant bridegroom without further parley. Then Mathew Brant called for the shortest straw, which was found to be Martin Adale's.

That worthy laughed light-heartedly. "I go seek me the Master, Brethren," he said. "And the maiden shall be moved hither, under the charge of Mathew's dame, till she be well. Say I not wisely?"

He strode away with a flush on his handsome face to find the Master, who, too, was much troubled in his mind concerning Priscilla.

Over the way, Mistress Priscilla lay in her snow-white bed, the casement opened wide for the song of the nightingales to be borne within. And her soul was filled with a great fear and longing lest she should die without the gates. But as she lay, staring with faint eyes at the shadow cast by the candle on the ceiling, the doctor returned, and with him the Master of the Hospital. And besides the Master of the Hospital were two strong dames who carried a litter. The dames placed Priscilla within the litter, and bore her tenderly across the road, beneath the old portal, through the dim, dark passages, and laid her to sleep within an oaken chamber, the walls and roof of which were black with age—the oaken chamber where her father died, and which was now set apart for the use of Martin Adale.

Through the open lattice came the smell of lavender and blossoming pinks; nightingales trilled in the limes; a little stream plashed softly over the hillside, and fell away through fern-clad banks, into the roadway below. As the moonlight played upon the foot of the bed, Priscilla saw the women's pitying faces wet with tears. "Forgive me, dames; I was distraught," she cried, and fell asleep.

As the days went by, Priscilla came back from the kingdom of dreams and shadows—back from the dim, sad underworld, where never children's voices make music for the soul, and all is cold—so cold that they who hover on the brink of Death return, a grey faintness sealed upon their brows, and strange, far-off eyes that see not all the beauty of the world, its warmth and light and colour, its music and love and laughter, but mark only dismal phantoms, drawn hither and thither by unseen hands. Soon she sat once more in the old garden, watching Martin Adale, the bravest spadesman of them all, as he raised a wall around his radishes which no intrusive slug might penetrate. And every stroke of his spade in the freshly-smelling earth was pleasant to her. Every word he spake was as music in Priscilla's ears. The burden and the bitterness were lifted from her soul.

"I will get me without the gates and pray for forgiveness," she told sturdy Martin, as he leant on his spade, and looked into her faded eyes with his own deep blue ones. "I have sinned against the Brethren until I was like to die of my own wickedness. Now will I hie me back to the world again."

"I'faith," said Martin, leaning on his spade, "I'faith; Mistress Priscilla, thou canst not."

"And why not?" queried Priscilla wonderingly.

"Tush, tush!" said merry Martin; "dost not know thou art mine by lot—that I would fain give thee thy heart's desire? So long as life remaineth here" (he struck his massive chest with a huge fist), "so long dost thou stay here also."

"I—I understand not, good Master Adale," murmured Priscilla, gazing up at him with troubled eyes. "I beseech you, do not mock me."

"Thou art mine by lot," said sturdy Martin. "We be twelve honourable men and true; we did not mean to use thee ill. Belike 'twas our misfortune and the Foundation statutes. The only way thou couldst re-enter here was as the wife of one of us, and mine is the favoured lot. Come, fair Mistress Priscilla, what sayest thou?"

"'Tis a goodly home," said Priscilla shyly.

"Thou art a goodly maid, also," said Martin. "Come, sweeting. These brave old men and true be all agog for a wedding. On the word of a soldier I love thee."

"I am somewhat old," quoth Priscilla, yieldingly.

"Sweetest apples be ripest," said Martin Adale, and bussed her.

Whereat eleven ancient men, disgracefully peeping from behind the sweet-savoured limes, wagged grey beards all, and laughed "Ho! ho!"

GEORGE GISSING

(1857–1903)

GEORGE GISSING'S first novel was *The Unclaimed* (1884), and it was followed during the next seventeen years by a considerable number, among which are *Demos* (1886), *The Nether World* (1889), *New Grub Street* (1891)—one of his most successful stories—and *In the Year of Jubilee* (1894). He usually wrote of the middle classes, and his outlook on life was depressing. This was probably due largely to the want of pence which vexed him during most of his life. Toward the end his circumstances improved, and he was able to travel: his *By the Ionian Sea* appeared in 1901. His last book, *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft*, showed a happier spirit than his earlier works and an unsuspected love of nature.

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HUMPLEBEE

THE school was assembled for evening prayers, some threescore boys representing for the most part the well-to-do middle class of a manufacturing county. At either end of the room glowed a pleasant fire, for it was February and the weather had turned to frost.

Silence reigned, but on all the young faces turned to where the headmaster sat at his desk appeared an unwonted expression, an eager expectancy, as though something out of the familiar routine were about to happen. When the master's voice at length sounded, he did not read from the book before him; gravely, slowly, he began to speak of an event which had that day stirred the little community with profound emotion.

"Two of our number are this evening absent. Happily, most happily, absent but for a short time; in our prayers we shall render thanks to the good Providence which has saved us from a terrible calamity. I do not desire to dwell upon the circumstance that one of these boys, Chadwick, had committed worse than an imprudence in venturing upon the Long Pond; it was in disregard of my injunction; I had distinctly made it known that the ice was still unsafe. We will speak no more of that. All we can think of at present is the fact that Chadwick was on the point of losing his life; that in all human probability he would have been drowned, but for the help heroically afforded him by one of his schoolfellows. I say heroically, and I am sure I do not exaggerate; in the absence of Humplebee I may declare that he nobly perilled his own life to save that of another. It was a splendid bit of courage, a fine example of pluck and promptitude and vigour. We have all cause this night to be proud of Humplebee."

The solemn voice paused. There was an instant's profound silence. Then, from somewhere amid the rows of listeners, sounded a clear, boyish note.

"Sir, may we give three cheers for Humplebee?"

"You may."

The threescore leapt to their feet, and volleys of cheering made the schoolroom echo. Then the master raised his hand, the tumult subsided, and after a few moments of agitated silence, prayers began.

Next morning there appeared as usual at his desk a short, thin, redheaded boy of sixteen, whose plain, freckled face denoted good-humour and a certain intelligence, but would never have drawn attention amongst the livelier and comelier physiognomies grouped about him. This was Humplebee. Hitherto he had been an insignificant member of the school, one of those boys who excel neither at games nor at lessons, of whom nothing is expected, and rarely, if ever, get into trouble, and who are liked in a rather contemptuous way. Of a sudden he shone glorious; all tongues were busy with him, all eyes regarded him, everyone wished for the honour of his friendship. Humplebee looked uncomfortable. He had the sniffy beginnings of a cold, the result of yesterday's struggle in icy water, and his usual diffident and monosyllabic inclinations were intensified by the position in which he found himself. Clappings on the shoulder from bigger boys who had been wont to joke about his name made him flush nervously; to be addressed as "Humpy," or "Beetle," or "Buz," even though in a new tone, seemed to gratify him as little as before. It was plain that Humplebee would much have liked to be left alone. He stuck as closely as possible to his desk, and out of schooltime tried to steal apart from the throng.

But an ordeal awaited him. Early in the afternoon there arrived, from a great town not far away, a well-dressed and high-complexioned man, whose every look and accent declared commercial importance. This was Mr. Chadwick, father of the boy who had all but been drowned. He and the headmaster held private talk, and presently they sent for Humplebee. Merely to enter the "study" was at any time Humplebee's dread; to do so under the present circumstances cost him anguish of spirit.

"Ha! here he is!" exclaimed Mr. Chadwick, in the voice of bluff geniality which seemed to him appropriate. "Humplebee, let me shake hands with you! Humplebee, I am proud to make your acquaintance; prouder still to thank you, to thank you, my boy!"

The lad was painfully overcome; his hands quivered, he stood like one convicted of disgraceful behaviour.

"I think you have heard of me, Humplebee. Leonard has no doubt spoken to you of his father. Perhaps my name has reached you in other ways?"

"Yes, sir," faltered the boy.

"You mean that you know me as a public man?" urged Mr. Chadwick, whose eyes glimmered a hungry vanity.

"Yes, sir," whispered Humplebee.

"Ha! I see you already take an intelligent interest in things beyond school. They tell me you are sixteen, Humplebee. Come, now; what are your ideas about the future? I don't mean"—Mr. Chadwick rolled a laugh—"about the future of mankind, or even the future of the English race; you and I may perhaps discuss such questions a few years hence. In the meantime, what are your personal ambitions? In brief, what would you like to be, Humplebee?"

Under the eye of his master and of the commercial potentate, Humplebee stood voiceless; he gasped once or twice like an expiring fish.

"Courage, my boy, courage!" cried Mr. Chadwick. "Your father, I believe, destines you for commerce. Is that your own wish? Speak freely. Speak as though I were a friend you have known all your life."

"I should like to please my father, sir," jerked from the boy's lips.

"Good! Admirable! That's the spirit I like, Humplebee. Then you have no marked predilection? That was what I wanted to discover—well, well, we shall see. Meanwhile, Humplebee, get on with your arithmetic. You are good at arithmetic, I am sure?"

"Not very, sir."

"Come, come, that's your modesty. But I like you none the worse for it, Humplebee. Well, well, get on with your work, my boy, and we shall see, we shall see."

Therewith, to his vast relief, Humplebee found himself dismissed. Later in the day he received a summons to the bedroom where Mr. Chadwick's son was being carefully nursed. Leonard Chadwick, about the same age as his rescuer, had never deigned to pay much attention to Humplebee, whom he regarded as stupid and plebeian; but the boy's character was marked by a generous impulsiveness, which came out strongly in the present circumstances.

"Hallo, Humpy!" he cried, raising himself up when the other entered. "So you pulled me out of that hole! Shake hands, Buzzy, old fellow! You've had a talk with my governor, haven't you? What do you think of him?"

Humplebee muttered something incoherent.

"My governor is going to make your fortune, Humpy!" cried Leonard. "He told me so, and when he says a thing he means it. He's going to start you in business when you leave school; most likely you'll go into his own office. How will you like that, Humpy? My governor thinks no end of you; says you're a brick, and so you are. I shan't forget that you pulled me out of that hole, old chap. We shall be friends all our lives, you know. Tell me what you thought of my governor."

When he was on his legs again, Leonard continued to treat Humplebee with grateful, if somewhat condescending, friendliness. In the talks they had together the great man's son continually expatiated upon his preserver's brilliant prospects. Beyond possibility of doubt Humplebee would some day be a rich man; Mr. Chadwick had said so, and whatever he purposed came to pass. To all this Humplebee listened in a dogged sort of way, now and then smiling, but seldom making verbal answer. In school he was not quite the same boy as before his exploit; he seemed duller, less attentive, and at times even incurred reproaches for work ill done—previously a thing unknown. When the holidays came, no boy was so glad as Humplebee; his heart sang within him as he turned his back upon the school and began the journey homeward.

That home was in the town illuminated by Mr. Chadwick's commercial and municipal brilliance; over a small draper's shop in one of the outskirt streets stood the name of Humplebee the draper. About sixty years of age, he had known plenty of misfortune and sorrows, with scant admixture of happiness. Nowadays things were somewhat better with him; by dint of severe economy he had put aside two or three hundred pounds, and he was able, moreover, to give his son (an only child) what is called a sound education. In the limited rooms above the shop there might have been a measure of quiet content and hopefulness, but for Mrs. Humplebee. She, considerably younger than her husband, fretted against her narrow circumstances, and grudged the money that was being spent—wasted, she called it—on the boy Harry.

From his father Harry never heard talk of pecuniary troubles, but the mother lost no opportunity of letting him know that they were poor, miserably poor; and adding, that if he did not work hard at school he was simply a cool-hearted criminal, and robbed his parents of their bread.

But during the last month or two a change had come upon the household. One day the draper received a visit from the great Mr. Chadwick, who told a wonderful story of Harry's heroism, and made proposals sounding so nobly generous that Mr. Humplebee was overcome with gratitude.

Harry, as his father knew, had no vocation for the shop; to get him a place in a manufacturer's office seemed the best thing that could be aimed at, and here was Mr. Chadwick talking of easy book-keeping, quick advancement, and all manner of vaguely splendid possibilities in the future. The draper's joy proved Mrs. Humplebee's opportunity. She put forward a project which had of late been constantly on her mind and on her lips, to wit, that they should transfer their business into larger premises, and give themselves a chance of prosperity. Humplebee need no longer hesitate. He had his little capital to meet the first expenses, and if need arose there need not be the slightest doubt that Mr. Chadwick would assist him. A kind gentleman, Mr. Chadwick! Had he not expressly desired to see Harry's mother, and had he not assured her in every way possible of his debt and gratitude he felt towards all who bore the name of Humplebee? The draper, if he neglected his opportunity, would be an idiot—a mere idiot.

So, when the boy came home for his holidays he found two momentous things decided; first, that he should forthwith enter Mr. Chadwick's office; secondly, that the little shop should be abandoned and a new one taken in a better neighbourhood.

Now Harry Humplebee had in his soul a secret desire and a secret abhorrence. Ever since he could read his delight had been in books of natural history; beasts, birds, and fishes possessed his imagination, and for nothing else in the intellectual world did he really care. With poor resources he had learned a great deal of his beloved subjects. Whenever he could get away into the fields he was happy; to lie still for hours watching some wild thing, noting its features and its ways, seemed to him perfect enjoyment. His treasure was a collection, locked in a cupboard at home, of eggs, skeletons, butterflies, beetles, and I know not what. His father regarded all this as harmless amusement, his mother contemptuously tolerated it or, in worse humour, condemned it as waste of time. When at school the boy had frequent opportunities of pursuing his study, for he was in mid-country and could wander as he liked on free afternoons; but neither the headmaster nor his assistant thought it worth while to pay heed to Humplebee's predilection. True, it had been noticed more than once that in writing an "essay" he showed unusual observation of natural things; this, however, did not strike his educators as a matter of any importance; it was not their business to discover what Humplebee could do, and wished to do, but to make him do things they regarded as desirable. Humplebee was marked for commerce; he must study compound interest, and be strong at discount. Yet the boy loathed every such mental effort, and the name of "business" made him sick at heart.

How he longed to unbosom himself to his father! And in the first week of his holiday he had a chance of doing so, a wonderful chance, such as had never entered his dreams. The town possessed a museum of natural history, where, of course, Harry had often spent leisure hours. Half a year ago a happy chance had brought him into conversation with the curator, who could not but be struck by the lad's intelligence, and who took an interest in him. Now they met again; they had one or two long talks, with the result that, on a Sunday afternoon, the curator of the museum took the trouble to call upon Mr. Humplebee, to speak with him about his son. At the museum was wanted a lad with a taste for natural history, to perform at first certain easy duties, with the prospect of further advancement here or elsewhere. It seemed to the curator that Harry was the very boy for the place; would Mr. Humplebee like to consider this suggestion? Now, if it had been made to him half a year ago, such an offer would have seemed to Mr. Humplebee well worth consideration, and he knew that Harry would have heard of it with delight; as it was, he could not entertain the thought for a moment.

Impossible to run the risk of offending Mr. Chadwick; moreover, who could hesitate between the modest possibilities of the museum and such a career as waited the lad under the protection of his powerful friend? With nervous haste the draper explained how matters stood, excused himself, and begged that not another word on the subject might be spoken in his son's hearing.

Harry Humplebee knew what he had lost; the curator, in talk with him, had already thrown out his suggestion; at their next meeting he discreetly made known to the boy that other counsels must prevail. For the first time Harry felt a vehement impulse, prompting him to speak on his own behalf, to assert and to plead for his own desires. But courage failed him. He heard his father loud in praise of Mr. Chadwick, intent upon the gratitude and respect due to that admirable man. He knew how his mother would exclaim at the mere hint of disinclination to enter the great man's office. And so he held his peace, though it cost him bitterness of heart and even secret tears. A long, long time passed before he could bring himself to enter again the museum doors.

He sat on a stool in Mr. Chadwick's office, a clerk at a trifling salary. Everything, his father reminded him, must have a beginning; let him work well and his progress would be rapid. Two years passed and he was in much the same position; his salary had increased by one-half, but his work remained the same, mechanical, dreary, hateful to him in its monotony. Meanwhile his father's venture in the new premises had led to great embarrassments; business did not thrive; the day came when Mr. Humplebee, trembling and shamefaced, felt himself drawn to beg help of his son's so-called benefactor. He came away from the interview with empty hands. Worse than that, he had heard things about Harry which darkened his mind with a new anxiety.

"I greatly fear," said Mr. Chadwick, "that your son must seek a place in some other office. It's a painful thing; I wish I could have kept him; but the fact of the matter is that he shows utter incapacity. I have no fault to find with him otherwise; a good lad; in a smaller place of business he might do well enough. But he is altogether below the mark in an office such as *mine*. Don't distress yourself, Mr. Humplebee, I beg, I shall make it my care to inquire for suitable openings; you shall hear from me—you shall hear from me. Pray consider that your son is under notice to leave this day month. As for the—other matter of which you spoke, I can only repeat that the truest kindness is only to refuse assistance. I assure you it is. The circumstances forbid it. Clearly, what you have to do is to call together your creditors, and arrive at an understanding. It is my principle never to try to prop up a hopeless concern such as yours evidently is. Good day to you, Mr. Humplebee; good day."

A year later several things had happened. Mr. Humplebee was dead; his penniless widow had gone to live in another town on the charity of poor relatives, and Harry Humplebee sat in another office, drawing the salary at which he had begun under Mr. Chadwick, his home a wretched bedroom in the house of working-folk.

It did not appear to the lad that he had suffered any injustice. He knew his own inaptitude for the higher kind of office work, and he had expected his dismissal by Mr. Chadwick long before it came. What he did resent, and profoundly, was Mr. Chadwick's refusal to aid his father in that last death-grapple with ruinous circumstance. At the worst moment Harry wrote a letter to Leonard Chadwick, whom he had never seen since he left school. He told in simple terms the position of his family, and, without a word of justifying reminiscence, asked his fellowship to help them if he could. To this letter a reply came from London. Leonard Chadwick wrote briefly and hurriedly, but in good-natured terms; he was really very sorry indeed that he could do so little; the fact was, just now he stood on anything but good terms with his father, who kept him abominably short of cash. He enclosed five pounds, and, if possible, would soon send more.

"Don't suppose I have forgotten what I owe you. As soon as ever I find myself in an independent position you shall have substantial proof of my enduring gratitude. Keep me informed of your address."

Humplebee made no second application, and Leonard Chadwick did not again break silence.

The years flowed on. At five-and-twenty Humplebee toiled in the same office, but he could congratulate himself on a certain progress; by dogged resolve he had acquired something like efficiency in the duties of a commercial clerk, and the salary he now earned allowed him to contribute to the support of his mother. More or less reconciled to the day's labour, he had resumed in leisure hours his favourite study; a free library supplied him with useful books, and whenever it was possible he went his way into the fields, searching, collecting, observing. But his life had another interest, which threatened rivalry to this intellectual pursuit. Humplebee had set eyes upon the maiden destined to be his heart's desire; she was the daughter of a fellow-clerk, a man who had grown grey in service of the ledger; timidly he sought to win her kindness, as yet scarce daring to hope, dreaming only of some happy change of position which might encourage him to speak. The girl was as timid as himself; she had a face of homely prettiness, a mind uncultured but sympathetic; absorbed in domestic cares, with few acquaintances, she led the simplest of lives, and would have been all but content to live on in gentle hope for a score of years. The two were beginning to understand each other, for their silence was more eloquent than their speech.

One summer day—the last day of his brief holiday—Humplebee was returning by train from a visit to his mother. Alone in a third-class carriage, seeming to read a newspaper, but in truth dreaming of a face he hoped to see in a few hours, he suddenly found himself jerked out of his seat, flung violently forward, bumped on the floor, and last of all rolled into a sort of bundle, he knew not where. Recovering from a daze, he said to himself, "Why, this is an accident—a collision!" Then he tried to unroll himself, and in the effort found that one of his arms was useless; more than that, it pained him horribly. He stood up and tottered on to the seat. Then the carriage-door opened, and a voice shouted:

"Anybody hurt here?"

"I think my arm is broken," answered Humplebee.

Two men helped him to alight. The train had stopped just outside a small station; on a cross line in front of the engine lay a goods truck smashed to pieces; people were rushing about with cries and gesticulations.

"Yes, the arm is broken," remarked one of the men who had assisted Humplebee. "It looks as if you were the only passenger injured." That proved, indeed, to be the case; no one else had suffered more than a jolt or a bruise. The crowd clustered about this hero of the broken arm, expressing sympathy and offering suggestions. Among them was a well-dressed young man, rather good-looking and of lively demeanour, who seemed to enjoy the excitement; he, after gazing fixedly at the pain-stricken face, exclaimed in a voice of wonder:

"By Jove! it's Humplebee!"

The sufferer turned towards him who spoke; his eyes brightened, for he recognised the face of Leonard Chadwick. Neither one nor the other had greatly altered during the past ten years; they presented exactly the same contrast of personal characteristic as when they were at school together. With vehement friendliness Chadwick at once took upon himself the care of the injured clerk. He shouted for a cab, he found out where the nearest doctor lived; in a quarter of an hour he had his friend under the doctor's roof. When the fracture had been set and bandaged, they travelled on together to their native town, only a few miles distant, Humplebee knowing for the first time in his life the luxury of a first-class compartment. On their way Chadwick talked exuberantly. He was delighted at this meeting; why, one of his purposes in coming north had been to search out Humplebee, whom he had so long scandalously neglected.

"The fact is, I've been going through queer times myself. The governor and I cannot get along together; we quarrelled years ago, there's not much chance of our making it up. I've no doubt that was the real reason of his dismissing you from his office—a mean thing! The governor's a fine old boy, but he has his nasty side. He's very tight about money, and I—well, I'm a bit too much the other way, no doubt. He's kept me in low water, confound him! But I'm independent of him now. I'll tell you all about it to-morrow, you'll feel better to talk. Expect me at eleven in the morning."

Through a night of physical suffering Humplebee was supported by a new hope. Chadwick the son, warm-hearted and generous, made a strong contrast with Chadwick the father, pompous and insincere. When the young man spoke of his abiding gratitude there was no possibility of distrusting him, his voice rang true, and his handsome features wore a delightful frankness. Punctual to his appointment, Leonard appeared next morning. He entered the poor lodging as if it had been a luxurious residence, talked suavely and gaily with the landlady, who was tending her invalid, and, when alone with his old schoolfellow, launched into a detailed account of a great enterprise in which he was concerned. Not long ago he had become acquainted with one Geldershaw, a man somewhat older than himself, personally most attractive, and very keen in business. Geldershaw had just been appointed London representative of a great manufacturing firm in Germany. It was a most profitable undertaking, and, out of pure friendship, he had offered a share in the business to Leonard Chadwick.

"Of course, I put money into it. The fact is, I have dropped in for a few thousands from a good old aunt, who has been awfully kind to me since the governor and I fell out. I couldn't possibly have found a better investment, it means eight or nine per cent., my boy, at the very least! And look here, Humplebee, of course you can keep books?"

"Yes, I can," answered the listener conscientiously.

"Then, old fellow, a first-rate place is open to you. We want some one we can thoroughly trust; you're the very man Geldershaw had in his eye. Would you mind telling me what screw you get at present?"

"Two pounds ten a week."

"Ha, ha," laughed Chadwick exultantly. "With us you shall begin at double the figure, and I'll see to it that you have a rise after the first year. What's more, Humplebee, as soon as we get fairly going, I promise you a share in the business. Don't say a word, old boy! My governor treated you abominably. I've been in your debt for ten years or so, as you know very well, and often enough I've felt deucedly ashamed of myself. Five pounds a week to begin with, and a certainty of a comfortable interest in a thriving affair! Come, now, is it agreed?"

Humplebee forgot his pain; he felt ready to jump out of bed and travel straightway to London.

"And you know," pursued Chadwick, when they had shaken hands warmly, "that you have a claim for damages on the railway company. Leave that to me; I'll put the thing in train at once, through my own solicitor. You shall pocket a substantial sum, my boy! Well, I'm afraid I must be off; I've got my hands full of business. Quite a new thing for me to have something serious to do; I enjoy it! If I can't see you again before I go back to town, you shall hear from me in a day or two. Here's my London address. Chuck up your place here at once, so as to be ready for us as soon as your arm's all right. Geldershaw shall write you a formal engagement."

Happily his broken arm was the left. Humplebee could use his right hand, and did so, very soon after Chadwick's departure, to send an account of all that had befallen him to his friend Mary Bowes. It was the first time he had written to her. His letter was couched in terms of studious respect, with many apologies for the liberty he took.

Of the accident he made light—a few days would see him re-established—but he dwelt with some emphasis upon the meeting with Leonard Chadwick, and what had resulted from it.

"I did him a good turn once, when we were at school together. He is a good, warm-hearted fellow, and has sought this opportunity of showing that he remembered the old time."

Thus did Humplebee refer to the great event of his boyhood. Having dispatched the letter, he waited feverishly for Miss Bowes' reply; but days passed and still he waited in vain. Agitation delayed his recovery; he was suffering as he had never suffered in his life, when there came a letter from London, signed with the name of Geldershaw, repeating in formal terms the offer made to him by Leonard Chadwick, and requesting his immediate acceptance or refusal. This plucked him out of his despondent state, and spurred him to action. With the help of his landlady he dressed himself, and, having concealed his bandaged arm as well as possible, drove in a cab to Miss Bowes' dwelling. The hour being before noon, he was almost sure to find Mary at home, and alone. Trembling with bodily weakness and the conflict of emotions, he rang the door bell. To his consternation there appeared Mary's father.

"Hallo! Humplebee!" cried Mr. Bowes, surprised but friendly. "Why, I was just going to write to you. Mary has had scarlet fever. I've been so busy these last ten days, I couldn't even inquire after you. Of course, I saw about your smash in the newspaper; how are you getting on?"

The man with the bandaged arm could not utter a word. Horror-stricken he stared at Mr. Bowes, who had begun to express a doubt whether it would be prudent for him to enter the house.

"Mary is convalescent; the anxiety's all over, but——"

Humplebee suddenly seized the speaker's hand, and in confused words expressed vehement joy. They talked for a few minutes, parted with cordiality, and Humplebee went home again to recover from his excitement.

A note from his employers had replied in terms of decent condolence to the message by which he explained his enforced absence. To-day he wrote to the principal, announcing his intention of resigning his post in their office. The response, delivered within a few hours, was admirably brief and to the point. Mr. Humplebee's place had, of course, been already taken temporarily by another clerk; it would have been held open for him, but, in view of his decision, the firm had merely to request that he would acknowledge the cheque enclosed in payment of his salary up to date. Not without some shaking of the hand did Humplebee pen this receipt; for a moment something seemed to come between him and the daylight, and a heaviness oppressed his inner man. But already he had dispatched to London his formal acceptance of the post at five pounds a week, and in thinking of it his heart grew joyous. Two hundred and sixty pounds a year! It was beyond the hope of his most fantastic day-dreams. He was a made man, secure for ever against fears and worries. He was a man of substance, and need no longer shrink from making known the hope which ruled his life.

A second letter was written to Mary Bowes; but not till many copies had been made was it at length dispatched. The writer declared that he looked for no reply until Mary was quite herself again; he begged only that she would reflect, meanwhile, upon what he had said, reflect with all her indulgence, all her native goodness and gentleness. And, indeed, there elapsed nearly a fortnight before the answer came; and to Humplebee it seemed an endless succession of tormenting days. Then——

Humplebee behaved like one distracted. His landlady in good earnest thought he had gone crazy, and was only reassured when he revealed to her what had happened. Mary Bowes was to be his wife! They must wait for a year and a half; Mary could not leave her father quite alone, but in a year and a half Mr. Bowes, who was an oldish man, would be able to retire on the modest fruit of his economies, and all three could live together in London. "What," cried Humplebee, "was eighteen months? It would allow him to save enough out of his noble salary to start housekeeping with something more than comfort. Blessed be the name of Chadwick!"

When his arm was once more sound, and Mary's health quite recovered, they met. In their long, long talk Humplebee was led to tell the story of that winter day when he saved Leonard Chadwick's life; he related, too, all that had ensued upon his acquaintance with the great Mr. Chadwick, memories which would never lose all their bitterness. Mary was moved to tears, and her tears were dried by indignation. But they agreed that Leonard, after all, made some atonement for his father's heartless behaviour. Humplebee showed a letter that had come from young Chadwick a day or two ago; every line spoke generosity of spirit. "When," he asked, "might they expect their new bookkeeper. They were in full swing; business promised magnificently. As yet, they had only a temporary office, but Geldershaw was in treaty for fine premises in the city. The sooner Humplebee arrived the better; fortune awaited him."

It was decided that he should leave for London in two days.

The next evening he came to spend an hour or two with Mary and her father. On entering the room he at once observed something strange in the looks with which he was greeted. Mary had a pale, miserable air, and could hardly speak. Mr. Bowes after looking at him fixedly for a moment, exclaimed:

"Have you seen to-day's paper?"

"I've been too busy," he replied. "What has happened?"

"Isn't your London man called Geldershaw?"

"Yes," murmured Humplebee, with a sinking of the heart.

"Well, the police are after him; he has bolted. It's a long-firm swindle that he's been up to. You know what that means? Obtaining goods on false credit, and raising money on them. What's more, young Chadwick is arrested; he came before the magistrates yesterday, charged with being an accomplice. Here it is; read it for yourself."

Humplebee dropped into a chair. When his eyes undazzled, he read the full report which Mr. Bowes had summarised. It was the deathblow of his hopes.

"Leonard Chadwick has been a victim, not a swindler," sounded from him in a feeble voice. "You see, he says that Geldershaw has robbed him of all his money—that he is ruined."

"He *says* so," remarked Mr. Bowes with angry irony.

"I believe him," said Humplebee.

His eyes sought Mary's. The girl regarded him steadily, and she spoke in a low firm voice:

"I, too, believe him."

"Whether or no," said Mr. Bowes, thrusting his hands into his pockets, "the upshot of it is, Humplebee, that you've lost a good place through trusting him. I had my doubts; but you were in a hurry, and didn't ask advice. If this had happened a week later, the police would have laid hands on you as well."

"So there's something to be thankful for, at all events," said Mary.

Again Humplebee met her eyes. He saw that she would not forsake him.

He had to begin life over again—that was all.

JOSEPH CONRAD

(1857–1924)

JOSEPH CONRAD, or, to give him his full name, Feodor Josef Konrad Korzeniowski, was born of noble parents in the Ukraine, Poland. He early made up his mind to master the English tongue. With this determination was bound up his desire to sail the seas, which he was equally resolved to do only under the English flag. His seafaring career, both before the mast and as an officer, may be said to have lasted, roughly, fifteen years—until he was thirty—and during that time he voyaged both far and wide. It was due to the encouragement of John Galsworthy and Edward Garnett that Conrad settled down seriously to write. If his success was not instantaneous, it was steady and assured, and now his books and stories are reckoned as amongst the most exquisitely wrought in the language. Among his most notable books are *Almayer's Folly* (1895), *The Nigger of the Narcissus* (1897), *Lord Jim* (1900), and *Typhoon* (1903).

"The Inn of the Two Witches," from *Within the Tides* (1915), is reprinted by kind permission of the Trustee of the Conrad Estate.

THE INN OF THE TWO WITCHES

A Find

THIS tale, episode, experience—call it how you will—was related in the fifties of the last century by a man who, by his own confession, was sixty years old at the time. Sixty is not a bad age—unless in perspective, when no doubt it is contemplated by the majority of us with mixed feelings. It is a calm age; the game is practically over by then; and standing aside one begins to remember with a certain vividness what a fine fellow one used to be. I have observed that, by an amiable attention of Providence, most people at sixty begin to take a romantic view of themselves. Their very failures exhale a charm of peculiar potency. And indeed the hopes of the future are a fine company to live with, exquisite forms, fascinating if you like, but—so to speak—naked, stripped for a run. The robes of glamour are luckily the property of the immovable past which, without them, would sit, a shivery sort of thing, under the gathering shadows.

I suppose it was the romanticism of growing age which set our man to relate his experience for his own satisfaction or for the wonder of his posterity. It could not have been for his glory, because the experience was simply that of an abominable fright—terror he calls it. You would have guessed that the relation alluded to in the very first lines was in writing.

This writing constitutes the Find declared in the sub-title. The title itself is my own contrivance (can't call it invention), and has the merit of veracity. We will be concerned with an inn here. As to the witches that's merely a conventional expression, and we must take our man's word for it that it fits the case.

The Find was made in a box of books bought in London, in a street which no longer exists, from a second-hand bookseller in the last stage of decay. As to the books themselves they were at least twentieth-hand, and on inspection turned out not worth the very small sum of money I disbursed. It might have been some premonition of that fact which made me say: "But I must have the box too." The decayed bookseller assented by the careless, tragic gesture of a man already doomed to extinction.

A litter of loose pages at the bottom of the box excited my curiosity but faintly. The close, neat, regular handwriting was not attractive at first sight. But in one place the statement that in A.D. 1813 the writer was twenty-two years old caught my eye. Two-and-twenty is an interesting age in which one is easily reckless and easily frightened; the faculty of reflection being weak and the power of imagination strong.

In another place the phrase: "At night we stood in again," arrested my languid attention, because it was a sea phrase. "Let's see what it is all about," I thought, without excitement.

Oh! but it was a dull-faced MS., each line resembling every other line in their close-set and regular order. It was like the drone of a monotonous voice. A treatise on sugar-refining (the dreariest subject I can think of) could have been given a more lively appearance. "In A.D. 1813, I was twenty-two years old," he begins earnestly and goes on with every appearance of calm, horrible industry. Don't imagine, however, that there is anything archaic in my find. Diabolic ingenuity in invention though as old as the world is by no means a lost art. Look at the telephones for shattering the little peace of mind given to us in this world, or at the machine guns for letting with dispatch life out of our bodies. Nowadays any blear-eyed old witch if only strong enough to turn an insignificant little handle could lay low a hundred young men of twenty in the twinkling of an eye.

If this isn't progress! . . . Why, immense! We have moved on, and so you must expect to meet here a certain naïveness of contrivance and simplicity of aim appertaining to the remote epoch. And of course no motoring tourist can hope to find such an inn anywhere, now. This one, the one of the title, was situated in Spain. That much I discovered only from internal evidence, because a good many pages of that relation were missing—perhaps not a great misfortune after all. The writer seemed to have entered into a most elaborate detail of the why and wherefore of his presence on that coast—presumably the north coast of Spain. His experience has nothing to do with the sea, though. As far as I can make it out, he was an officer on board a sloop-of-war. There's nothing strange in that. At all stages of the long Peninsular campaign many of our men-of-war of the smaller kind were cruising off the north coast of Spain—as risky and disagreeable a station as can be well imagined.

It looks as though that ship of his had had some special service to perform. A careful explanation of all the circumstances was to be expected from our man, only, as I've said, some of his pages (good tough paper too) were missing: gone in covers for jam pots or in wadding for the fowling-pieces of his irreverent posterity. But it is to be seen clearly that communication with the shore and even the sending of messengers inland was part of her service, either to obtain intelligence from or to transmit orders or advice to patriotic Spaniards, guerilleros or secret juntas of the province. Something of the sort. All this can be only inferred from the preserved scraps of his conscientious writing.

Next we come upon the panegyric of a very fine sailor, a member of the ship's company, having the rating of the captain's coxswain. He was known on board as Cuba Tom; not because he was Cuban however; he was indeed the best type of a genuine British tar of that time, and a man-of-war's man for years. He came by the name on account of some wonderful adventures he had in that island in his young days, adventures which were the favourite subject of the yarns he was in the habit of spinning to his shipmates of an evening on the forecastle head. He was intelligent, very strong, and of proved courage. Incidentally we are told, so exact is our narrator, that Tom had the finest pigtail for thickness and length of any man in the Navy. This appendage, much cared for and sheathed tightly in a porpoise skin, hung half-way down his broad back to the great admiration of all beholders and to the great envy of some.

Our young officer dwells on the manly qualities of Cuba Tom with something like affection. This sort of relation between officer and man was not then very rare. A youngster on joining the service was put under the charge of a trustworthy seaman, who slung his first hammock for him and often later on became a sort of humble friend to the junior officer. The narrator on joining the sloop had found this man on board after some years of separation. There is something touching in the warm pleasure he remembers and records at this meeting with the professional mentor of his boyhood.

We discover then that, no Spaniard being forthcoming for the service, this worthy seaman with the unique pigtail and a very high character for courage and steadiness had been selected as messenger for one of these missions inland which have been mentioned. His preparations were not elaborate. One gloomy autumn morning the sloop ran close to a shallow cove where a landing could be made on that iron-bound shore. A boat was lowered, and pulled in with Tom Corbin (Cuba Tom) perched in the bow, and our young man (Mr. Edgar Byrne was his name on this earth which knows him no more) sitting in the stern sheets.

A few inhabitants of a hamlet, whose grey stone houses could be seen a hundred yards or so up a deep ravine, had come down to the shore and watched the approach of the boat. The two Englishmen leaped ashore. Either from dulness or astonishment the peasants gave no greeting, and only fell back in silence.

Mr. Byrne had made up his mind to see Tom Corbin started fairly on his way. He looked round at the heavy surprised faces.

"There isn't much to get out of them," he said. "Let us walk up to the village. There will be a wine-shop for sure where we may find somebody more promising to talk to and get some information from."

"Ay, ay, sir," said Tom falling into step behind his officer. "A bit of palaver as to courses and distances can do no harm; I crossed the broadest part of Cuba by the help of my tongue though knowing far less Spanish than I do now. As they say themselves it was 'four words and no more' with me, that time when I got left behind on shore by the *Blanche*, frigate."

He made light of what was before him, which was but a day's journey into the mountains. It is true that there was a full day's journey before striking the mountain path, but that was nothing for a man who had crossed the island of Cuba on his two legs, and with no more than four words of the language to begin with.

The officer and the man were walking now on a thick sodden bed of dead leaves, which the peasants thereabouts accumulate in the streets of their villages to rot during the winter for field manure. Turning his head Mr. Byrne perceived that the whole male population of the hamlet was following them on the noiseless springy carpet. Women stared from the doors of the houses and the children had apparently gone into hiding. The village knew the ship by sight, afar off, but no stranger had landed on that spot perhaps for a hundred years or more. The cocked hat of Mr. Byrne, the bushy whiskers and the enormous pigtail of the sailor, filled them with mute wonder. They pressed behind the two Englishmen staring like those islanders discovered by Captain Cook in the South Seas.

It was then that Byrne had his first glimpse of the little cloaked man in a yellow hat. Faded and dingy as it was, this covering for his head made him noticeable.

The entrance to the wine-shop was like a rough hole in a wall of flints. The owner was the only person who was not in the street, for he came out from the darkness at the back where the inflated forms of wine skins hung on nails could be vaguely distinguished. He was a tall, one-eyed Asturian with scrubby, hollow cheeks; a grave expression of countenance contrasted enigmatically with the roaming restlessness of his solitary eye. On learning that the matter in hand was the sending on his way of that English mariner toward a certain Gonzales in the mountains, he closed his good eye for a moment as if in meditation. Then opened it, very lively again.

"Possibly, possibly. It could be done."

A friendly murmur arose in the group in the doorway at the name of Gonzales, the local leader against the French. Inquiring as to the safety of the road Byrne was glad to learn that no troops of that nation had been seen in the neighbourhood for months. Not the smallest little detachment of these impious *polizones*. While giving these answers the owner of the wine-shop busied himself in drawing into an earthenware jug some wine which he set before the heretic English, pocketing with grave abstraction the small piece of money the officer threw upon the table in recognition of the unwritten law that none may enter a wine-shop without buying drink. His eye was in constant motion as if it were trying to do the work of the two; but when Byrne made inquiries as to the possibility of hiring a mule, it became immovably fixed in the direction of the door which was closely besieged by the curious. In front of them, just within the threshold, the little man in the large cloak and yellow hat had taken his stand. He was a diminutive person, a mere homunculus, Byrne describes him, in a ridiculously mysterious, yet assertive attitude, a corner of his cloak thrown cavalierly over his left shoulder, muffling his chin and mouth; while the broad-brimmed yellow hat hung on a corner of his square little head. He stood there taking snuff, repeatedly.

"A mule," repeated the wine-seller, his eyes fixed on that quaint and snuffy figure. . . . "No, señor officer! Decidedly no mule is to be got in this poor place."

The coxswain, who stood by with the true sailor's air of unconcern in strange surroundings, struck in quietly:

"If your honour will believe me Shank's pony's the best for this job. I would have to leave the beast somewhere, anyhow, since the captain has told me that half my way will be along paths fit only for goats."

The diminutive man made a step forward, and speaking through the folds of the cloak which seemed to muffle a sarcastic intention:

"Si, señor. They are too honest in this village to have a single mule amongst them for your worship's service. To that I can bear testimony. In these times it's only rogues or very clever men who can manage to have mules or any other four-footed beasts and the wherewithal to keep them. But what this valiant mariner wants is a guide; and here, señor, behold my brother-in-law, Bernardino, wine-seller, and alcade of this most Christian and hospitable village, who will find you one."

This, Mr. Byrne says in his relation, was the only thing to do. A youth in a ragged coat and goatskin breeches was produced after some more talk. The English officer stood treat to the whole village, and while the peasants drank he and Cuba Tom took their departure accompanied by the guide. The diminutive man in the cloak had disappeared.

Byrne went along with the coxswain out of the village. He wanted to see him fairly on his way; and he would have gone a greater distance, if the seaman had not suggested respectfully the advisability of return so as not to keep the ship a moment longer than necessary so close in with the shore on such an unpromising looking morning. A wild gloomy sky hung over their heads when they took leave of each other, and their surroundings of rank bushes and stony fields were dreary.

"In four days' time," were Byrne's last words, "the ship will stand in and send a boat on shore if the weather permits. If not you'll have to make it out on shore the best you can till we come along to take you off."

"Right you are, sir," answered Tom, and strode on. Byrne watched him step out on a narrow path. In a thick pea-jacket with a pair of pistols in his belt, a cutlass by his side, and a stout cudgel in his hand, he looked a sturdy figure and well able to take care of himself. He turned round for a moment to wave his hand, giving to Byrne one more view of his honest bronzed face with bushy whiskers. The lad in goatskin breeches looking, Byrne says, like a faun or a young satyr leaping ahead, stopped to wait for him, and then went off at a bound. Both disappeared.

Byrne turned back. The hamlet was hidden in a fold of the ground, and the spot seemed the most lonely corner of the earth and as if accursed in its uninhabited desolate barrenness. Before he had walked many yards, there appeared very suddenly from behind a bush the muffled up diminutive Spaniard. Naturally Byrne stopped short.

The other made a mysterious gesture with a tiny hand peeping from under his cloak. His hat hung very much at the side of his head. "Señor," he said without any preliminaries. "Caution! It is a positive fact that one-eyed Bernardino, my brother-in-law, has at this moment a mule in his stable. And why he who is not clever has a mule there? Because he is a rogue; a man without conscience. Because I had to give up the *macho* to him to secure for myself a roof to sleep under and a mouthful of *olla* to keep my soul in this insignificant body of mine. Yet, señor, it contains a heart many times bigger than the mean thing which beats in the breast of that brute connection of mine of which I am ashamed, though I opposed that marriage with all my power. Well, the misguided woman suffered enough. She had her purgatory on this earth—God rest her soul."

Byrne says he was so astonished by the sudden appearance of that sprite-like being, and by the sardonic bitterness of the speech, that he was unable to disentangle the significant fact from what seemed but a piece of family history fired out at him without rhyme or reason. Not at first. He was confounded and at the same time he was impressed by the rapid forcible delivery, quite different from the frothy excited loquacity of an Italian. So he stared while the homunculus, letting his cloak fall about him, aspired an immense quantity of snuff out of the hollow of his palm.

"A mule," exclaimed Byrne, seizing at last the real aspect of the discourse. "You say he has got a mule? That's queer! Why did he refuse to let me have it?"

The diminutive Spaniard muffled himself up again with great dignity.

"*Quien sabe?*" he said coldly, with a shrug of his draped shoulders. "He is a great *politico* in everything he does. But one thing your worship may be certain of—that his intentions are always rascally. This husband of my *defunta* sister ought to have been married a long time ago to the widow with the wooden legs." *

"I see. But remember that, whatever your motives, your worship countenanced him in this lie."

The bright unhappy eyes on each side of a predatory nose confronted Byrne without wincing, while with that testiness which lurks so often at the bottom of Spanish dignity:

"No doubt the señor officer would not lose an ounce of blood if I were stuck under the fifth rib," he retorted. "But what of this poor sinner here?" Then changing his tone. "Señor, by the necessities of the times I live here in exile, a Castilian and an old Christian, existing miserably in the midst of these brute Asturians, and dependent on the worst of them all, who has less conscience and scruples than a wolf. And being a man of intelligence I govern myself accordingly. Yet I can hardly contain my scorn. You have heard the way I spoke. A caballero of parts like your worship might have guessed that there was a cat in there."

"What cat?" said Byrne uneasily. "Oh, I see. Something suspicious. No, señor. I guessed nothing. My nation are not good guessers at that sort of thing; and, therefore, I ask you plainly whether that wine-seller has spoken the truth in other particulars?"

"There are certainly no Frenchmen anywhere about," said the little man with a return to his indifferent manner.

"Or robbers—*ladrones?*"

"*Ladrones en grande*—no! Assuredly not," was the answer in a cold philosophical tone. "What is there left for them to do after the French? And nobody travels in these times. But who can say! Opportunity makes the robber. Still that mariner of yours has a fierce aspect, and with the son of a cat rats will have no play. But there is a saying, too, that there where honey is there will soon be flies."

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* The gallows, supposed to be widowed of the last executed criminal and waiting for another.

This oracular discourse exasperated Byrne. "In the name of God," he cried, "tell me plainly if you think my man is reasonably safe on his journey."

The homunculus, undergoing one of his rapid changes, seized the officer's arm. The grip of his little hand was astonishing.

"Señor! Bernardino had taken notice of him. What more do you want? And listen—men have disappeared on this road—on a certain portion of this road, when Bernardino kept a *meson*, an inn, and I, his brother-in-law, had coaches and mules for hire. Now there are no travellers, no coaches. The French have ruined me. Bernardino had retired here for reasons of his own after my sister died. They were three to torment the life out of her, he and Erminia and Lucilla, two aunts of his—all affiliated to the devil. And now he has robbed me of my last mule. You are an armed man. Demand the *macho* from him, with a pistol to his head, señor—it is not his, I tell you—and ride after your man who is so precious to you. And then you shall both be safe, for no two travellers have been ever known to disappear together in those days. As to the beast, I, its owner, I confide it to your honour."

They were staring hard at each other, and Byrne nearly burst into a laugh at the ingenuity and transparency of the little man's plot to regain possession of his mule. But he had no difficulty to keep a straight face because he felt deep within himself a strange inclination to do that very extraordinary thing. He did not laugh, but his lip quivered; at which the diminutive Spaniard, detaching his black glittering eyes from Byrne's face, turned his back on him brusquely with a gesture and a fling of the cloak which somehow expressed contempt, bitterness, and discouragement all at once. He turned away and stood still, his hat aslant, muffled up to the ears. But he was not offended to the point of refusing the silver *duro* which Byrne offered him with a non-committal speech as if nothing extraordinary had passed between them.

"I must make haste on board now," said Byrne, then.

"*Vaya usted con Dios*," muttered the gnome. And this interview ended with a sarcastic low sweep of the hat which was replaced at the same perilous angle as before.

Directly the boat had been hoisted the ship's sails were filled on the off-shore tack, and Byrne imparted the whole story to his captain, who was but a very few years older than himself. There was some amused indignation at it—but while they laughed they looked gravely at each other. A Spanish dwarf trying to beguile an officer of his Majesty's navy into stealing a mule for him—that was too funny, too ridiculous, too incredible. Those were the exclamations of the captain. He couldn't get over the grotesqueness of it.

"Incredible. That's just it," murmured Byrne at last in a significant tone.

They exchanged a long stare. "It's as clear as daylight," affirmed the captain impatiently, because in his heart he was not certain. And Tom—the best seaman in the ship for one, the good-humouredly deferential friend of his boyhood for the other—was becoming endowed with a compelling fascination, like a symbolic figure of loyalty appealing to their feelings and their conscience, so that they could not detach their thoughts from his safety. Several times they went up on deck, only to look at the coast, as if it could tell them something of his fate. It stretched away, lengthening in the distance, mute, naked, and savage, veiled now and then by the slanting cold shafts of rain. The westerly swell rolled its interminable angry lines of foam and big dark clouds flew over the ship in a sinister procession.

"I wish to goodness you had done what your little friend in the yellow hat wanted you to do," said the commander of the sloop late in the afternoon with visible exasperation.

"Do you, sir?" answered Byrne, bitter with positive anguish. "I wonder what you would have said afterwards? Why! I might have been kicked out of the service for looting a mule from a nation in alliance with his Majesty. Or I might have been battered to a pulp with flails and pitchforks—a pretty tale to get abroad about one of your officers—while trying to steal a mule. Or chased ignominiously to the boat—for you would not have expected me to shoot down unoffending people for the sake of a mangy mule. . . . And yet," he added in a low voice, "I almost wish myself I had done it."

Before dark those two young men had worked themselves up into a highly complex psychological state of scornful scepticism and alarmed credulity. It tormented them exceedingly; and the thought that it would last for six days at least, and possibly be prolonged further for an indefinite time, was not to be borne. The ship was therefore put on the inshore tack at dark. All through the gusty dark night she went towards the land to look for her man, at times lying over in the heavy puffs, at others rolling idle in the swell, nearly stationary, as if she too had a mind of her own to swing perplexed between cool reason and warm impulse.

Then just at daybreak a boat put off from her and went on tossed by the seas towards the shallow cove where, with considerable difficulty, an officer in a thick coat and a round hat managed to land on a strip of shingle.

"It was my wish," writes Mr. Byrne, "a wish of which my captain approved, to land secretly if possible. I did not want to be seen either by my aggrieved friend in the yellow hat, whose motives were not clear, or by the one-eyed wine-seller, who may or may not have been affiliated to the devil, or indeed by any other dweller in that primitive village. But unfortunately the cove was the only possible landing place for miles; and from the steepness of the ravine I couldn't make a circuit to avoid the houses.

"Fortunately," he goes on, "all the people were yet in their beds. It was barely daylight when I found myself walking on the thick layer of sodden leaves filling the only street. No soul was stirring abroad, no dog barked. The silence was profound, and I had concluded with some wonder that apparently no dogs were kept in the hamlet, when I heard a low snarl, and from a noisome alley between two hovels emerged a vile cur with its tail between its legs. He slunk off silently showing me his teeth as he ran before me, and he disappeared so suddenly that he might have been the unclean incarnation of the Evil One. There was, too, something so weird in the manner of its coming and vanishing, that my spirits, already by no means very high, became further depressed by the revolting sight of this creature as if by an unlucky presage."

He got away from the coast unobserved, as far as he knew, then struggled manfully to the west against wind and rain, on a barren dark upland, under a sky of ashes. Far away the harsh and desolate mountains raising their scarped and denuded ridges seemed to wait for him menacingly. The evening found him fairly near to them, but, in sailor language, uncertain of his position, hungry, wet, and tired out by a day of steady tramping over broken ground during which he had seen very few people, and had been unable to obtain the slightest intelligence of Tom Corbin's passage. "On! on! I must push on," he had been saying to himself through the hours of solitary effort, spurred more by incertitude than by any definite fear or definite hope.

The lowering daylight died out quickly, leaving him faced by a broken bridge. He descended into the ravine, forded a narrow stream by the last gleam of rapid water, and clambering out on the other side was met by the night which fell like a bandage over his eyes. The wind sweeping in the darkness the broadside of the sierra worried his ears by a continuous roaring noise as of a maddened sea. He suspected that he had lost the road. Even in daylight, with its ruts and mud-holes and ledges of outcropping stone, it was difficult to distinguish from the dreary waste of the moor interspersed with boulders and clumps of naked bushes. But, as he says, he "steered his course by the feel of the wind," his hat rammed low on his brow, his head down, stopping now and again from mere weariness of mind rather than of body—as if not his strength but his resolution were being overtaxed by the strain of endeavour half suspected to be vain, and by the unrest of his feelings.

In one of these pauses borne in the wind faintly, as if from very far away, he heard a sound of knocking, just knocking on wood. He noticed that the wind had lulled suddenly.

His heart started beating tumultuously because in himself he carried the impression of the desert solitudes he had been traversing for the last six hours—the oppressive sense of an uninhabited world. When he raised his head a gleam of light, illusory as it often happens in dense darkness, swam before his eyes. While he peered, the sound of feeble knocking was repeated—and suddenly he felt rather than saw the existence of a massive obstacle in his path. What was it? The spur of a hill? Or was it a house! Yes. It was a house right close, as though it had risen from the ground or had come gliding to meet him, dumb and pallid, from some dark recess of the night. It towered loftily. He had come up under its lee; another three steps and he could have touched the wall with his hand. It was no doubt a *posada* and some other traveller was trying for admittance. He heard again the sound of cautious knocking.

Next moment a broad band of light fell into the night through the opened door. Byrne stepped eagerly into it, whereupon the person outside leaped with a stifled cry away into the night. An exclamation of surprise was heard too, from within. Byrne, flinging himself against the half closed door, forced his way in against some considerable resistance.

A miserable candle, a mere rushlight, burned at the end of a long deal table. And in its light Byrne saw, staggering yet, the girl he had driven from the door. She had a short black skirt, an orange shawl, a dark complexion—and the escaped single hairs from the mass, sombre and thick like a forest and held up by a comb, made a black mist about her low forehead. A shrill lamentable howl of: "Misericordia!" came in two voices from the further end of the long room, where the firelight of an open hearth played between heavy shadows. The girl recovering herself drew a hissing breath through her set teeth.

It is unnecessary to report the long process of questions and answers by which he soothed the fears of two old women who sat on each side of the fire, on which stood a large earthenware pot. Byrne thought at once of two witches watching the brewing of some deadly potion. But all the same, when one of them raising forward painfully her broken form lifted the cover of the pot, the escaping steam had an appetising smell. The other did not budge, but sat hunched up, her head trembling all the time.

They were horrible. There was something grotesque in their decrepitude. Their toothless mouths, their hooked noses, the meagreness of the active one, and the hanging yellow cheeks of the other (the still one, whose head trembled) would have been laughable if the sight of their dreadful physical degradation had not been appalling to one's eyes, had not gripped one's heart with poignant amazement at the unspeakable misery of age, at the awful persistency of life becoming at last an object of disgust and dread.

To get over it Byrne began to talk, saying that he was an Englishman, and that he was in search of a countryman who ought to have passed this way. Directly he had spoken the recollection of his parting with Tom came up in his mind with amazing vividness: the silent villagers, the angry gnome, the one-eyed wine-seller, Bernardino. Why! These two unspeakable frights must be that man's aunts—affiliated to the devil.

Whatever they had been once it was impossible to imagine what use such feeble creatures could be to the devil, now, in the world of the living. Which was Lucilla and which was Erminia? They were now things without a name. A moment of suspended animation followed Byrne's words. The sorceress with the spoon ceased stirring the mess in the iron pot, the very trembling of the other's head stopped for the space of breath. In this infinitesimal fraction of a second Byrne had the sense of being really on his quest, of having reached the turn of the path, almost within hail of Tom.

"They have seen him," he thought with conviction. Here was at last somebody who had seen him. He made sure they would deny all knowledge of the Ingles; but on the contrary they were eager to tell him that he had eaten and slept the night in the house. They both started talking together, describing his appearance and behaviour. An excitement quite fierce in its feebleness possessed them. The doubled-up sorceress flourished aloft her wooden spoon, the puffy monster got off her stool and screeched, stepping from one foot to the other, while the trembling of her head was accelerated to positive vibration. Byrne was quite disconcerted by their excited behaviour. . . . Yes! The big, fierce Ingles went away in the morning, after eating a piece of bread and drinking some wine. And if the caballero wished to follow the same path nothing could be easier—in the morning.

"You will give me somebody to show me the way?" said Byrne.

"Si, señor. A proper youth. The man the caballero saw going out."

"But he was knocking at the door," protested Byrne. "He only bolted when he saw me. He was coming in."

"No! No!" the two horrid wretches screamed out together. "Going out. Going out!"

After all it may have been true. The sound of knocking had been faint, elusive, reflected Byrne. Perhaps only the effect of his fancy. He asked:

"Who is that man?"

"Her *novio,*" they screamed, pointing to the girl. "He is gone home to a village far away from here. But he will return in the morning. Her *novio!* And she is an orphan—the child of poor Christian people. She lives with us for the love of God, for the love of God."

The orphan crouching on the corner of the hearth had been looking at Byrne. He thought that she was more like a child of Satan kept there by these two weird harridans for the love of the devil. Her eyes were a little oblique, her mouth rather thick, but admirably formed; her dark face had a wild beauty, voluptuous and untamed. As to the character of her steadfast gaze attached upon him with a sensuously savage attention, "to know what it was like," says Mr. Byrne, "you have only to observe a hungry cat watching a bird in a cage or a mouse inside a trap."

It was she who served him the food, of which he was glad; though with those big slanting black eyes examining him at close range, as if he had something curious written on his face, she gave him an uncomfortable sensation. But anything was better than being approached by these blear-eyed nightmarish witches. His apprehensions somehow had been soothed; perhaps by the sensation of warmth after severe exposure and the ease of resting after the exertion of fighting the gale inch by inch all the way. He had no doubt of Tom's safety. He was now sleeping in the mountain camp having been met by Gonzales' men.

Byrne rose, filled a tin goblet with wine out of a skin hanging on the wall, and sat down again. The witch with the mummy face began to talk to him, ramblingly of old times; she boasted of the inn's fame in those better days. Great people in their own coaches stopped there. An archbishop slept once in the *casa,* a long, long time ago.

The witch with the puffy face seemed to be listening from her stool, motionless, except for the trembling of her head. The girl (Byrne was certain she was a casual gipsy admitted there for some reason or other) sat on the hearthstone in the glow of the embers. She hummed a tune to herself, rattling a pair of castanets slightly now and then. At the mention of the archbishop she chuckled impiously and turned her head to look at Byrne, so that the red glow of the fire flashed in her black eyes and on her white teeth under the dark cowl of the enormous overmantel. And he smiled at her.

He rested now in the ease of security. His advent not having been expected there could be no plot against him in existence. Drowsiness stole upon his senses. He enjoyed it, but keeping a hold, so he thought at least, on his wits; but he must have been gone further than he thought because he was startled beyond measure by a fiendish uproar. He had never heard anything so pitilessly strident in his life. The witches had started a fierce quarrel about something or other. Whatever its origin they were now only abusing each other violently, without arguments; their senile screams expressed nothing but wicked anger and ferocious dismay. The gipsy girl's black eyes flew from one to the other. Never before had Byrne felt himself so removed from fellowship with human beings. Before he had really time to understand the subject of the quarrel, the girl jumped up rattling her castanets loudly. A silence fell. She came up to the table and bending over, her eyes in his——

"Señor," she said with decision. "You shall sleep in the archbishop's room."

Neither of the witches objected. The dried-up one bent double was propped on a stick. The puffy-faced one had now a crutch.

Byrne got up, walked to the door, and turning the key in the enormous lock put it coolly in his pocket. This was clearly the only entrance, and he did not mean to be taken unawares by whatever danger there might have been lurking outside. When he turned from the door he saw the two witches "affiliated to the devil" and the Satanic girl looking at him in silence. He wondered if Tom Corbin took the same precaution last night. And thinking of him he had again that queer impression of his nearness. The world was perfectly dumb. And in this stillness he heard the blood beating in his ears with a confused rushing noise, in which there seemed to be a voice uttering the words: "Mr. Byrne, look out, sir." Tom's voice. He shuddered; for the delusions of the senses of hearing are the most vivid of all, and from their nature have a compelling character.

It seemed impossible that Tom should not be there. Again a slight chill as of stealthy draught penetrated through his very clothes and passed over all his body. He shook off the impression with an effort.

It was the girl who preceded him upstairs carrying an iron lamp from the naked flame of which ascended a thin thread of smoke. Her soiled white stockings were full of holes.

With the same quiet resolution with which he had locked the door below, Byrne threw open, one after another, the doors in the corridor. All the rooms were empty except for some nondescript lumber in one or two. And the girl seeing what he would be at stopped every time, raising the smoky light in each doorway patiently. Meantime she observed him with sustained attention. The last door of all she threw open herself.

"You sleep here, señor," she murmured in a voice light like a child's breath, offering him the lamp.

"*Buenas noches, señorita,*" he said politely, taking it from her.

She didn't return the wish audibly, though her lips did move a little, while her gaze, black like a starless night, never for a moment wavered before him. He stepped in, and as he turned to close the door she was still there motionless and disturbing, with her voluptuous mouth and slanting eyes, with the expression of expectant sensual ferocity of a baffled cat. He hesitated for a moment, and in the dumb house he heard again the blood pulsating ponderously in his ears, while once more the illusion of Tom's voice speaking earnestly somewhere near by was specially terrifying, because this time he could not make out the words.

He slammed the door in the girl's face at last, leaving her in the dark; and he opened it again almost on the instant. Nobody. She had vanished without the slightest sound. He closed the door quickly and bolted it with two heavy bolts.

A profound mistrust possessed him suddenly. Why did the witches quarrel about letting him sleep here? And what meant that stare of the girl as if she wanted to impress his features for ever in her mind? His own nervousness alarmed him. He seemed to himself to be removed very far from mankind.

He examined his room. It was not very high, just high enough to take the bed which stood under an enormous baldaquin-like canopy from which fell heavy curtains at foot and head; a bed certainly worthy of an archbishop. There was a heavy table carved all round the edges, some armchairs of enormous weight like the spoils of a grandee's palace; a tall shallow wardrobe placed against the wall and with double doors. He tried them. Locked. A suspicion came into his mind, and he snatched the lamp to make a closer examination. No, it was not a disguised entrance. That heavy, tall piece of furniture stood clear of the wall by quite an inch. He glanced at the bolts of his room door. No! No one could get at him treacherously while he slept. But would he be able to sleep? he asked himself anxiously. If only he had Tom there—the trusty seaman who had fought at his right hand in a cutting out affair or two, and had always preached to him the necessity to take care of himself. "For it's no great trick," he used to say, "to get yourself killed in a hot fight. Any fool can do that. The proper pastime is to fight the Frenchies and then live to fight another day."

Byrne found it a hard matter not to fall into listening to the silence. Somehow he had the conviction that nothing would break it unless he heard again the haunting sound of Tom's voice. He had heard it twice before. Odd! And yet no wonder, he argued with himself reasonably, since he had been thinking of the man for over thirty hours continuously and, what's more, inconclusively. For his anxiety for Tom had never taken a definite shape. "Disappear," was the only word connected with the idea of Tom's danger. It was very vague and awful. "Disappear!" What did that mean?

Byrne shuddered, and then said to himself that he must be a little feverish. But Tom had not disappeared. Byrne had just heard of him.

And again the young man felt the blood beating in his ears. He sat still expecting every moment to hear through the pulsating strokes the sound of Tom's voice. He waited straining his ears, but nothing came. Suddenly the thought occurred to him: "He has not disappeared, but he cannot make himself heard."

He jumped up from the armchair. How absurd! Laying his pistol and his hanger on the table he took off his boots and, feeling suddenly too tired to stand, flung himself on the bed which he found soft and comfortable beyond his hopes.

He had felt very wakeful, but he must have dozed off after all, because the next thing he knew he was sitting up in bed and trying to recollect what it was that Tom's voice had said. Oh! He remembered it now. It had said: "Mr. Byrne! Look out, sir!" A warning this. But against what?

He landed with one leap in the middle of the floor, gasped once, then looked all round the room. The window was shuttered and barred with an iron bar. Again he ran his eyes slowly all round the bare walls, and even looked up at the ceiling, which was rather high. Afterwards he went to the door to examine the fastenings. They consisted of two enormous iron bolts sliding into holes made in the wall; and as the corridor outside was too narrow to admit of any battering arrangement or even to permit an axe to be swung, nothing could burst the door open—unless gunpowder. But while he was still making sure that the lower bolt was pushed well home, he received the impression of somebody's presence in the room. It was so strong that he spun round quicker than lightning. There was no one. Who could there be? And yet . . .

It was then that he lost the decorum and restraint a man keeps up for his own sake. He got down on his hands and knees, with the lamp on the floor, to look under the bed, like a silly girl. He saw a lot of dust and nothing else. He got up, his cheeks burning, and walked about discontented with his own behaviour and unreasonably angry with Tom for not leaving him alone. The words: "Mr. Byrne! Look out, sir," kept on repeating themselves in his head in a tone of warning.

"Hadn't I better just throw myself on the bed and try to go to sleep?" he asked himself. But his eyes fell on the tall wardrobe, and he went towards it feeling irritated with himself and yet unable to desist. How he could explain to-morrow the burglarious misdeed to the two odious witches he had no idea. Nevertheless he inserted the point of his hanger between the two halves of the door and tried to prize them open. They resisted. He swore, sticking now hotly to his purpose. His mutter: "I hope you will be satisfied, confound you," was addressed to the absent Tom. Just then the doors gave way and flew open.

He was there.

He—the trusty, sagacious, and courageous Tom was there, drawn up shadowy and stiff, in a prudent silence, which his wide-open eyes by their fixed gleam seemed to command Byrne to respect. But Byrne was too startled to make a sound. Amazed, he stepped back a little—and on the instant the seaman flung himself forward headlong as if to clasp his officer round the neck. Instinctively Byrne put out his faltering arms; he felt the horrible rigidity of the body and then the coldness of death as their heads knocked together and their faces came into contact. They reeled, Byrne hugging Tom close to his breast in order not to let him fall with a crash. He had just strength enough to lower the awful burden gently to the floor—then his head swam, his legs gave way, and he sank on his knees, leaning over the body with his hands resting on the breast of that man once full of generous life, and now as insensible as a stone.

"Dead! my poor Tom, dead," he repeated mentally. The light of the lamp standing near the edge of the table fell from above straight on the stony empty stare of these eyes which naturally had a mobile and merry expression.

Byrne turned his own away from them. Tom's black silk neckerchief was not knotted on his breast. It was gone. The murderers had also taken off his shoes and stockings. And noticing this spoliation, the exposed throat, the bare upturned feet, Byrne felt his eyes run full of tears. In other respects the seaman was fully dressed; neither was his clothing disarranged as it must have been in a violent struggle. Only his checked shirt had been pulled a little out of the waistband in one place, just enough to ascertain whether he had a money belt fastened round his body. Byrne began to sob into his handkerchief.

It was a nervous outburst which passed off quickly. Remaining on his knees he contemplated sadly the athletic body of as fine a seaman as ever had drawn a cutlass, laid a gun, or passed the weather earring in a gale, lying stiff and cold, his cheery, fearless spirit departed—perhaps turning to him, his boy chum, to his ship out there rolling on the grey seas off an iron-bound coast, at the very moment of its flight.

He perceived that the six brass buttons of Tom's jacket had been cut off. He shuddered at the notion of the two miserable and repulsive witches busying themselves ghoulishly about the defenceless body of his friend. Cut off. Perhaps with the same knife which . . . The head of one trembled; the other was bent double, and their eyes were red and bleared, their infamous claws unsteady. . . . It must have been in this very room too, for Tom could not have been killed in the open and brought in here afterwards. Of that Byrne was certain. Yet those devilish crones could not have killed him themselves even by taking him unawares—and Tom would be always on his guard of course. Tom was a very wide-awake wary man when engaged on any service. . . . And in fact how did they murder him? Who did? In what way?

Byrne jumped up, snatched the lamp off the table, and stooped swiftly over the body. The light revealed on the clothing no stain, no trace, no spot of blood anywhere. Byrne's hands began to shake so that he had to set the lamp on the floor and turn away his head in order to recover from this agitation.

Then he began to explore that cold, still, and rigid body for a stab, a gunshot wound, for the trace of some killing blow. He felt all over the skull anxiously. It was whole. He slipped his hand under the neck. It was unbroken. With terrified eyes he peered close under the chin and saw no marks of strangulation on the throat.

There were no signs anywhere. He was just dead.

Impulsively Byrne got away from the body as if the mystery of an incomprehensible death had changed his pity into suspicion and dread. The lamp on the floor near the set, still face of the seaman showed it staring at the ceiling as if despairingly. In the circle of light Byrne saw by the undisturbed patches of thick dust on the floor that there had been no struggle in that room. "He has died outside," he thought. Yes, outside in that narrow corridor, where there was hardly room to turn, the mysterious death had come to his poor dear Tom. The impulse of snatching up his pistols and rushing out of the room abandoned Byrne suddenly. For Tom, too, had been armed—with just such powerless weapons as he himself possessed—pistols, a cutlass! And Tom had died a nameless death, by incomprehensible means.

A new thought came to Byrne. That stranger knocking at the door and fleeing so swiftly at his appearance had come there to remove the body. Aha! That was the guide the withered witch had promised would show the English officer the shortest way of rejoining his man. A promise, he saw it now, of dreadful import. He who had knocked would have two bodies to deal with. Man and officer would go forth from the house together. For Byrne was certain now that he would have to die before the morning—and in the same mysterious manner, leaving behind him an unmarked body.

The sight of a smashed head, of a throat cut, of a gaping gunshot wound, would have been an inexpressible relief. It would have soothed all his fears. His soul cried within him to that dead man whom he had never found wanting in danger. "Why don't you tell me what I am to look for, Tom? Why don't you?" But in rigid immobility, extended on his back, he seemed to preserve an austere silence, as if disdaining in the finality of his awful knowledge to hold converse with the living.

Suddenly Byrne flung himself on his knees by the side of the body, and dry-eyed, fierce, opened the shirt wide on the breast, as if to tear the secret forcibly from that cold heart which had been so loyal to him in life! Nothing! Nothing! He raised the lamp, and all the sign vouchsafed to him by that face which used to be so kindly in expression was a small bruise on the forehead—the least thing, a mere mark. The skin even was not broken. He stared at it a long time as if lost in a dreadful dream. Then he observed that Tom's hands were clenched as though he had fallen facing somebody in a fight with fists. His knuckles, on closer view, appeared somewhat abraded. Both hands.

The discovery of these slight signs was more appalling to Byrne than the absolute absence of every mark would have been. So Tom had died striking against something which could be hit, and yet could kill one without leaving a wound—by a breath.

Terror, hot terror, began to play about Byrne's heart like a tongue of flame that touches and withdraws before it turns a thing to ashes. He backed away from the body as far as he could, then came forward stealthily casting fearful glances to steal another look at the bruised forehead. There would perhaps be such a faint bruise on his own forehead—before the morning.

"I can't bear it," he whispered to himself. Tom was for him now an object of horror, a sight at once tempting and revolting to his fear. He couldn't bear to look at him.

At last, desperation getting the better of his increasing horror, he stepped forward from the wall against which he had been leaning, seized the corpse under the armpits, and began to lug it over to the bed. The bare heels of the seaman trailed on the floor noiselessly. He was heavy with the dead weight of inanimate objects. With a last effort Byrne landed him face downwards on the edge of the bed, rolled him over, snatched from under this stiff passive thing a sheet with which he covered it over. Then he spread the curtains at head and foot so that, joining together as he shook their folds, they hid the bed altogether from his sight.

He stumbled towards a chair, and fell on it. The perspiration poured from his face for a moment, and then his veins seemed to carry for a while a thin stream of half-frozen blood. Complete terror had possession of him now, a nameless terror which had turned his heart to ashes.

He sat upright in the straight-backed chair, the lamp burning at his feet, his pistols and his hanger at his left elbow on the end of the table, his eyes turning incessantly in their sockets round the walls, over the ceiling, over the floor, in the expectation of a mysterious and appalling vision. The thing which could deal death in a breath was outside that bolted door. But Byrne believed neither in walls nor bolts now. Unreasoning terror turning everything to account, his old-time boyish admiration of the athletic Tom, the undaunted Tom (he had seemed to him invincible), helped to paralyse his faculties, added to his despair.

He was no longer Edgar Byrne. He was a tortured soul suffering more anguish than any sinner's body had ever suffered from rack or boot. The depth of his torment may be measured when I say that this young man, as brave at least as the average of his kind, contemplated seizing a pistol and firing into his own head. But a deadly, chilly, languor was spreading over his limbs. It was as if his flesh had been wet plaster stiffening slowly about his ribs. Presently, he thought, the two witches will be coming in, with crutch and stick—horrible, grotesque, monstrous—affiliated to the devil—to put a mark on his forehead, the tiny little bruise of death. And he wouldn't be able to do anything. Tom had struck out at something, but he was not like Tom. His limbs were dead already. He sat still, dying the death over and over again; and the only part of him which moved were his eyes, turning round and round in their sockets, running over the walls, the floor, the ceiling, again and again till suddenly they became motionless and stony—starting out of his head fixed in the direction of the bed.

He had seen the heavy curtains stir and shake as if the dead body they concealed had turned over and sat up. Byrne, who thought the world could hold no more terrors in store, felt his hair stir at the roots. He gripped the arms of the chair, his jaw fell, and the sweat broke out on his brow while his dry tongue clove suddenly to the roof of his mouth. Again the curtains stirred, but did not open. "Don't, Tom!" Byrne made effort to shout, but all he heard was a slight moan such as an uneasy sleeper may make. He felt that his brain was going, for, now, it seemed to him that the ceiling over the bed had moved, had slanted, and came level again—and once more the closed curtains swayed gently as if about to part.

Byrne closed his eyes not to see the awful apparition of the seaman's corpse coming out animated by an evil spirit. In the profound silence of the room he endured a moment of frightful agony, then opened his eyes again. And he saw at once that the curtains remained closed still, but that the ceiling over the bed had risen quite a foot. With the last gleam of reason left to him he understood that it was the enormous baldaquin over the bed which was coming down, while the curtains attached to it swayed softly, sinking gradually to the floor. His drooping jaw snapped to—and half rising in his chair he watched mutely the noiseless descent of the monstrous canopy. It came down in short smooth rushes till lowered half way or more, when it took a run and settled swiftly its turtle-back shape with the deep border piece fitting exactly the edge of the bedstead. A slight crack or two of wood were heard, and the overpowering stillness of the room resumed its sway.

Byrne stood up, gasped for breath, and let out a cry of rage and dismay, the first sound which he is perfectly certain did make its way past his lips on this night of terrors. This then was the death he had escaped! This was the devilish artifice of murder poor Tom's soul had perhaps tried from beyond the border to warn him of. For this was how he had died. Byrne was certain he had heard the voice of the seaman, faintly distinct in his familiar phrase, "Mr. Byrne! Look out, sir!" and again uttering words he could not make out. But then the distance separating the living from the dead is so great! Poor Tom had tried. Byrne ran to the bed and attempted to lift up, to push off the horrible lid smothering the body. It resisted his efforts, heavy as lead, immovable like a tombstone. The rage of vengeance made him desist; his head buzzed with chaotic thoughts of extermination, he turned round the room as if he could find neither his weapons nor the way out; and all the time he stammered awful menaces. . . .

A violent battering at the door of the inn recalled him to his soberer senses. He flew to the window, pulled the shutters open, and looked out. In the faint dawn he saw below him a mob of men. Ha! He would go and face at once this murderous lot collected no doubt for his undoing. After his struggle with nameless terrors he yearned for an open fray with armed enemies. But he must have remained yet bereft of his reason, because forgetting his weapons he rushed downstairs with a wild cry, unbarred the door while blows were raining on it outside, and flinging it open flew with his bare hands at the throat of the first man he saw before him. They rolled over together. Byrne's hazy intention was to break through, to fly up the mountain path, and come back presently with Gonzales' men to exact an exemplary vengeance. He fought furiously till a tree, a house, a mountain, seemed to crash down upon his head—and he knew no more.

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Here Mr. Byrne describes in detail the skilful manner in which he found his broken head bandaged, informs us that he had lost a great deal of blood, and ascribes the preservation of his sanity to that circumstance. He sets down Gonzales' profuse apologies in full too. For it was Gonzales who, tired of waiting for news from the English, had come down to the inn with half his band, on his way to the sea. "His excellency," he explained, "rushed out with fierce impetuosity, and, moreover, was not known to us for a friend, and so we . . ." etc., etc. When asked what had become of the witches, he only pointed his finger silently to the ground, then voiced calmly a moral reflection: "The passion for gold is pitiless in the very old, señor," he said.

"No doubt in former days they have put many a solitary traveller to sleep in the archbishop's bed."

"There was also a gipsy girl there," said Byrne feebly from the improvised litter on which he was being carried to the coast by a squad of guerilleros.

"It was she who winched up that infernal machine, and it was she too who lowered it that night," was the answer.

"But why? Why?" exclaimed Byrne. "Why should she wish for my death?"

"No doubt for the sake of your excellency's coat buttons," said politely the saturnine Gonzales. "We found those of the dead mariner concealed on her person. But your excellency may rest assured that everything that is fitting has been done on this occasion."

Byrne asked no more questions. There was still another death which was considered by Gonzales as "fitting to the occasion." The one-eyed Bernardino stuck against the wall of his wine-shop received the charge of six escopettas into his breast. As the shots rang out the rough bier with Tom's body on it went past carried by a bandit-like gang of Spanish patriots down the ravine to the shore, where two boats from the ship were waiting for what was left on earth of her best seaman.

Mr. Byrne, very pale and weak, stepped into the boat which carried the body of his humble friend. For it was decided that Tom Corbin should rest far out in the Bay of Biscay. The officer took the tiller and, turning his head for the last look at the shore, saw on the grey hillside something moving, which he made out to be a little man in a yellow hat mounted on a mule—that mule without which the fate of Tom Corbin would have remained mysterious for ever.

SIR ARTHUR CONAN DOYLE

(1859–1930)

ARTHUR CONAN DOYLE, choosing medicine for his career, qualified at Edinburgh. He was senior physician in the Langman Field Hospital during the South African War, of which he wrote an admirably succinct history. But it is by the creation of the character of the crime-detector, "Sherlock Holmes" that he will mostly be remembered. *A Study in Scarlet*, in which the great detective first appeared, was published in 1888 and won immediate popular success. Other "Sherlock Holmes" stories followed in quick succession, interspersed with colourful historical romances such as *The White Company* (1890), *Exploits of Brigadier Gerard* (1896), *Rodney Stone* (1896), and *Sir Nigel* (1906). Sir Henry

Irving's performance as "Corporal Brewster" in *A Straggler of Waterloo* brought Sir Arthur fame in the theatre. A picturesque style and a keen sense of dramatic values, combined with meticulous attention to detail, mark all his work. He was LL.D. of Edinburgh University, a Knight of St. John of Jerusalem, and received the honour of knighthood in 1902.

"The Stockbroker's Clerk," from *The Memoirs of Sherlock Holmes* (1902–3), is reprinted by kind permission of the author and Messrs. Harper and Brothers.

THE STOCKBROKER'S CLERK

SHORTLY after my marriage I had bought a connection in the Paddington district. Old Mr. Farquhar, from whom I purchased it, had at one time an excellent general practice, but his age, and an affliction of the nature of St. Vitus's dance from which he suffered, had very much thinned it. The public, not unnaturally, goes upon the principle that he who would heal others must himself be whole, and looks askance at the curative powers of the man whose own case is beyond the reach of his drugs. Thus, as my predecessor weakened his practice declined, until when I purchased it from him it had sunk from twelve hundred to little more than three hundred a year. I had confidence, however, in my own youth and energy, and was convinced that in a very few years the concern would be as flourishing as ever.

For three months after taking over the practice I was kept very closely at work, and saw little of my friend Sherlock Holmes, for I was too busy to visit Baker Street, and he seldom went anywhere himself save upon professional business. I was surprised, therefore, when one morning in June, as I sat reading the *British Medical Journal* after breakfast, I heard a ring at the bell followed by the high, somewhat strident, tones of my old companion's voice.

"Ah, my dear Watson," said he, striding into the room, "I am very delighted to see you. I trust that Mrs. Watson has entirely recovered from all the little excitements connected with our adventure of the 'Sign of Four'?"

"Thank you, we are both very well," said I, shaking him warmly by the hand.

"And I hope also," he continued, sitting down in the rocking-chair, "that the cares of medical practice have not entirely obliterated the interest which you used to take in our little deductive problems."

"On the contrary," I answered; "it was only last night that I was looking over my old notes and classifying some of our past results."

"I trust that you don't consider your collection closed?"

"Not at all. I should wish nothing better than to have some more of such experiences."

"To-day, for example?"

"Yes; to-day, if you like."

"And as far off as Birmingham?"

"Certainly, if you wish it."

"And the practice?"

"I do my neighbour's when he goes. He is always ready to work off the debt."

"Ha! Nothing could be better!" said Holmes, leaning back in his chair and looking keenly at me from under his half-closed lids. "I perceive that you have been unwell lately. Summer colds are always a little trying."

"I was confined to the house by a severe chill for three days last week. I thought, however, that I had cast off every trace of it."

"So you have. You look remarkably robust."

"How, then, did you know of it?"

"My dear fellow, you know my methods."

"You deduced it, then?"

"Certainly."

"And from what?"

"From your slippers."

I glanced down at the new patent leathers which I was wearing. "How on earth——?" I began, but Holmes answered my question before it was asked.

"Your slippers are new," he said. "You could not have had them more than a few weeks. The soles which you are at this moment presenting to me are slightly scorched. For a moment I thought they might have got wet and been burned in the drying. But near the instep there is a small circular wafer of paper with the shopman's hieroglyphics upon it. Damp would of course have removed this. You had then been sitting with your feet outstretched to the fire, which a man would hardly do even in so wet a June as this if he were in his full health."

Like all Holmes's reasoning the thing seemed simplicity itself when it was once explained. He read the thought upon my features, and his smile had a tinge of bitterness.

"I am afraid that I rather give myself away when I explain," said he. "Results without causes are much more impressive. You are ready to come to Birmingham, then?"

"Certainly. What is the case?"

"You shall hear it all in the train. My client is outside in a four-wheeler. Can you come at once?"

"In an instant." I scribbled a note to my neighbour, rushed upstairs to explain the matter to my wife, and joined Holmes upon the door-step.

"Your neighbour is a doctor?" said he, nodding at the brass plate.

"Yes. He bought a practice as I did."

"An old-established one?"

"Just the same as mine. Both have been ever since the houses were built."

"Ah, then you got hold of the best of the two."

"I think I did. But how do you know?"

"By the steps, my boy. Yours are worn three inches deeper than his. But this gentleman in the cab is my client, Mr. Hall Pycroft. Allow me to introduce you to him. Whip your horse up, cabby, for we have only just time to catch our train."

The man whom I found myself facing was a well-built, fresh-complexioned young fellow with a frank, honest face and a slight, crisp, yellow moustache. He wore a very shiny top-hat and a neat suit of sober black, which made him look what he was—a smart young City man, of the class who have been labelled Cockneys, but who give us our crack Volunteer regiments, and who turn out more fine athletes and sportsmen than any body of men in these islands. His round, ruddy face was naturally full of cheeriness, but the corners of his mouth seemed to me to be pulled down in a half-comical distress. It was not, however, until we were all in a first-class carriage and well started upon our journey to Birmingham, that I was able to learn what the trouble was which had driven him to Sherlock Holmes.

"We have a clear run here of seventy minutes," Holmes remarked. "I want you, Mr. Hall Pycroft, to tell my friend your very interesting experience exactly as you have told it to me, or with more detail if possible. It will be of use to me to hear the succession of events again. It is a case, Watson, which may prove to have something in it, or may prove to have nothing, but which at least presents those unusual and *outré* features which are as dear to you as they are to me. Now, Mr. Pycroft, I shall not interrupt you again."

Our young companion looked at me with a twinkle in his eye.

"The worst of the story is," said he, "that I show myself up as such a confounded fool. Of course, it may work out all right, and I don't see that I could have done otherwise; but if I have lost my crib and get nothing in exchange, I shall feel what a soft Johnny I have been. I'm not very good at telling a story, Dr. Watson, but it is like this with me.

"I used to have a billet at Coxon and Woodhouse's, of Drapers' Gardens, but they were let in early in the spring through the Venezuelan loan, as no doubt you remember, and came a nasty cropper. I had been with them five years, and old Coxon gave me a ripping good testimonial when the smash came; but, of course, we clerks were all turned adrift, the twenty-seven of us. I tried here and tried there, but there were lots of other chaps on the same lay as myself, and it was a perfect frost for a long time. I had been taking three pounds a week at Coxon's, and I had saved about seventy of them, but I soon worked my way through that and out at the other end. I was fairly at the end of my tether at last, and could hardly find the stamps to answer the advertisements or the envelopes to stick them to. I had worn out my boots padding up office stairs, and I seemed just as far from getting a billet as ever.

"At last I saw a vacancy at Mawson and Williams', the great stockbroking firm in Lombard Street. I daresay E.C. is not much in your line, but I can tell you that this is about the richest house in London. The advertisement was to be answered by letter only. I sent in my testimonial and application, but without the least hope of getting it. Back came an answer by return saying that if I would appear next Monday I might take over my new duties at once, provided that my appearance was satisfactory. No one knows how these things are worked. Some people say the manager just plunges his hand into the heap and takes the first that comes. Anyhow, it was my innings that time, and I don't ever wish to feel better pleased. The screw was a pound a week rise, and the duties just about the same as at Coxon's.

"And now I come to the queer part of the business. I was in diggings out Hampstead way—17, Potter's Terrace, was the address. Well, I was sitting doing a smoke that very evening after I had been promised the appointment, when up came my landlady with a card which had 'Arthur Pinner, financial agent,' printed upon it. I had never heard the name before, and could not imagine what he wanted with me, but of course I asked her to show him up. In he walked—a middle-sized, dark-haired, dark-eyed, black-bearded man, with a touch of the 'sheeny' about his nose. He had a brisk kind of way with him and spoke sharply, like a man that knew the value of time.

" 'Mr. Hall Pycroft, I believe?' said he.

" 'Yes, sir,' I answered, and pushed a chair towards him.

" 'Lately engaged at Coxon and Woodhouse's?'

" 'Yes, sir.'

" 'And now on the staff of Mawson's?'

" 'Quite so.'

" 'Well,' said he. 'The fact is that I have heard some really extraordinary stories about your financial ability. You remember Parker who used to be Coxon's manager? He can never say enough about it.'

"Of course I was pleased to hear this. I had always been pretty smart in the office, but I had never dreamed that I was talked about in the City in this fashion.

" 'You have a good memory?' said he.

" 'Pretty fair,' I answered, modestly.

" 'Have you kept in touch with the market while you have been out of work?' he asked.

" 'Yes; I read the Stock Exchange List every morning.'

" 'Now, that shows real application!' he cried. 'That is the way to prosper! You won't mind my testing you, will you? Let me see! How are Ayrshires?'

" 'One hundred and five, to one hundred and five and a quarter.'

" 'And New Zealand Consolidated?'

" 'A hundred and four.'

" 'And British Broken Hills?'

" 'Seven to seven and six.'

" 'Wonderful!' he cried, with his hands up. 'This quite fits in with all that I had heard. My boy, my boy, you are very much too good to be a clerk at Mawson's!'

"This outburst rather astonished me, as you can think. 'Well,' said I, 'other people don't think quite so much of me as you seem to do, Mr. Pinner. I had a hard enough fight to get this berth, and I am very glad to have it.'

" 'Pooh, man, you should soar above it. You are not in your true sphere. Now I'll tell you how it stands with me. What I have to offer is little enough when measured by your ability, but when compared with Mawson's it is light to dark. Let me see! When do you go to Mawson's?'

" 'On Monday.'

" 'Ha! ha! I think I would risk a little sporting flutter that you don't go there at all.'

" 'Not go to Mawson's?'

" 'No, sir. By that day you will be business manager of the Franco-Midland Hardware Company, Limited, with one hundred and thirty-four branches in the towns and villages of France, not counting one in Brussels and one in San Remo.'

"This took my breath away. 'I never heard of it,' said I.

" 'Very likely not. It has been kept very quiet, for the capital was all privately subscribed, and it is too good a thing to let the public into. My brother, Harry Pinner, is promoter, and joins the board after allotment as managing director. He knew that I was in the swim down here, and he asked me to pick up a good man cheap—a young, pushing man with plenty of snap about him. Parker spoke of you, and that brought me here to-night. We can only offer you a beggarly five hundred to start with——"

" 'Five hundred a year!' I shouted.

" 'Only that at the beginning, but you are to have an overriding commission of 1 per cent on all business done by your agents, and you may take my word for it that this will come to more than your salary.'

" 'But I know nothing about hardware.'

" 'Tut, my boy, you know about figures.'

"My head buzzed, and I could hardly sit still in the chair. But suddenly a little chill of doubt came over me.

" 'I must be frank with you,' said I. 'Mawson only gives me two hundred, but Mawson is safe. Now, really, I know so little about your company that——"

" 'Ah, smart, smart!' he cried, in a kind of ecstasy of delight. 'You are the very man for us! You are not to be talked over, and quite right too. Now here's a note for a hundred pounds; and if you think that we can do business you may just slip it into your pocket as an advance upon your salary.'

" 'That is very handsome,' said I. 'When shall I take over my new duties?'

" 'Be in Birmingham to-morrow at one,' said he. 'I have a note in my pocket here which you will take to my brother. You will find him at 126B, Corporation Street, where the temporary offices of the company are situated. Of course he must confirm your engagement, but between ourselves it will be all right.'

" 'Really, I hardly know how to express my gratitude, Mr. Pinner,' said I.

" 'Not at all, my boy. You have only got your deserts. There are one or two small things—mere formalities—which I must arrange with you. You have a bit of paper beside you there. Kindly write upon it, "I am perfectly willing to act as business manager to the Franco-Midland Hardware Company, Limited, at a minimum salary of £500." '

"I did as he asked, and he put the paper in his pocket.

" 'There is one other detail,' said he. 'What do you intend to do about Mawson's?'

"I had forgotten all about Mawson's in my joy.

" 'I'll write and resign,' said I.

" 'Precisely what I don't want you to do. I had a row over you with Mawson's manager. I had gone up to ask him about you, and he was very offensive—accused me of coaxing you away from the service of the firm, and that sort of thing. At last I fairly lost my temper. "If you want good men you should pay them a good price," said I. "He would rather have our small price than your big one," said he. "I'll lay you a fiver," said I, "that when he has my offer you will never so much as hear from him again." "Done!" said he. "We picked him out of the gutter, and he won't leave us so easily." Those were his very words.'

"'The impudent scoundrel!' I cried. 'I've never so much as seen him in my life. Why should I consider him in any way? I shall certainly not write if you would rather that I didn't.'

"'Good! That's a promise!' said he, rising from his chair. 'Well, I am delighted to have got so good a man for my brother. Here is your advance of a hundred pounds, and here is the letter. Make a note of the address, 126B, Corporation Street, and remember that one o'clock to-morrow is your appointment. Good night, and may you have all the fortune that you deserve.'

"That's just about all that passed between us as near as I can remember it. You can imagine, Dr. Watson, how pleased I was at such an extraordinary piece of good fortune. I sat up half the night hugging myself over it, and next day I was off to Birmingham in a train that would take me in plenty of time for my appointment. I took my things to an hotel in New Street, and then I made my way to the address which had been given me.

"It was a quarter of an hour before my time, but I thought that would make no difference. 126B was a passage between two large shops which led to a winding stone stair, from which there were many flats, let as offices to companies or professional men. The names of the occupants were painted up at the bottom on the wall, but there was no such name as the Franco-Midland Hardware Company, Limited. I stood for a few minutes with my heart in my boots, wondering whether the whole thing was an elaborate hoax or not, when up came a man and addressed me. He was very like the chap that I had seen the night before, the same figure and voice, but he was clean shaven and his hair was lighter.

"'Are you Mr. Hall Pycroft?' he asked.

"'Yes,' said I.

"'Ah! I was expecting you, but you are a trifle before your time. I had a note from my brother this morning, in which he sang your praises very loudly.'

"'I was just looking for the offices when you came.'

"'We have not got our name up yet, for we only secured these temporary premises last week. Come up with me and we will talk the matter over.'

"I followed him to the top of a very lofty stair, and there right under the slates were a couple of empty and dusty little rooms, uncarpeted and uncurtained, into which he led me. I had thought of a great office with shining tables and rows of clerks such as I was used to, and I daresay I stared rather straight at the two deal chairs and one little table, which, with a ledger and a waste-paper basket, made up the whole furniture.

"'Don't be disheartened, Mr. Pycroft,' said my new acquaintance, seeing the length of my face. 'Rome was not built in a day, and we have lots of money at our backs, though we don't cut much dash yet in offices. Pray sit down and let me have your letter.'

"I gave it to him, and he read it over very carefully.

"'You seem to have made a vast impression upon my brother, Arthur,' said he, 'and I know that he is a pretty shrewd judge. He swears by London, you know, and I by Birmingham, but this time I shall follow his advice. Pray consider yourself definitely engaged.'

"'What are my duties?' I asked.

"'You will eventually manage the great depot in Paris, which will pour a flood of English crockery into the shops of one hundred and thirty-four agents in France. The purchase will be completed in a week, and meanwhile you will remain in Birmingham and make yourself useful.'

"'How?'

"For answer he took a big red book out of a drawer. 'This is a directory of Paris,' said he, 'with the trades after the names of the people. I want you to take it home with you, and to mark off all the hardware sellers with their addresses. It would be of the greatest use to me to have them.'

"'Surely, there are classified lists?' I suggested.

"'Not reliable ones. Their system is different to ours. Stick at it and let me have the lists by Monday, at twelve. Good day, Mr. Pycroft; if you continue to show zeal and intelligence, you will find the company a good master.'

"I went back to the hotel with the big book under my arm, and with very conflicting feelings in my breast. On the one hand I was definitely engaged, and had a hundred pounds in my pocket. On the other, the look of the offices, the absence of name on the wall, and other of the points which would strike a business man had left a bad impression as to the position of my employers. However, come what might, I had my money, so I settled down to my task. All Sunday I was kept hard at work, and yet by Monday I had only got as far as H. I went round to my employer, found him in the same dismantled kind of room, and was told to keep at it until Wednesday, and then come again. On Wednesday it was still unfinished, so I hammered away until Friday—that is, yesterday. Then I brought it round to Mr. Harry Pinner.

"'Thank you very much,' said he. 'I fear that I underrated the difficulty of the task. This list will be of very material assistance to me.'

"'It took some time,' said I.

"'And now,' said he, 'I want you to make a list of the furniture shops, for they all sell crockery.'

" 'Very good.'

" 'And you can come up to-morrow evening at seven, and let me know how you are getting on. Don't overwork yourself. A couple of hours at Day's music hall in the evening would do you no harm after your labours.' He laughed as he spoke, and I saw with a thrill that his second tooth upon the left-hand side had been very badly stuffed with gold."

Sherlock Holmes rubbed his hands with delight, and I stared in astonishment at our client.

"You may well look surprised, Dr. Watson, but it is this way," said he. "When I was speaking to the other chap in London at the time that he laughed at my not going to Mawson's, I happened to notice that his tooth was stuffed in this very identical fashion. The glint of the gold in each case caught my eye, you see. When I put that with the voice and figure being the same, and only those things altered which might be changed by a razor or a wig, I could not doubt that it was the same man. Of course, you expect two brothers to be alike, but not that they should have the same tooth stuffed in the same way. He bowed me out and I found myself in the street, hardly knowing whether I was on my head or my heels. Back I went to my hotel, put my head in a basin of cold water, and tried to think it out. Why had he sent me from London to Birmingham; why had he got there before me; and why had he written a letter from himself to himself? It was altogether too much for me, and I could make no sense of it. And then suddenly it struck me that what was dark to me might be very light to Mr. Sherlock Holmes. I had just time to get up to town by the night train, to see him this morning, and to bring you both back with me to Birmingham."

There was a pause after the stockbroker's clerk had concluded his surprising experience. Then Sherlock Holmes cocked his eye at me, leaning back on the cushions with a pleased and yet critical face, like a connoisseur who had just taken his first sip of a comet vintage.

"Rather fine, Watson, is it not?" said he. "There are points in it which please me. I think you will agree with me that an interview with Mr. Arthur Harry Pinner in the temporary offices of the Franco-Midland Hardware Company, Limited, would be a rather interesting experience for both of us."

"But how can we do it?" I asked.

"Oh, easily enough," said Hall Pycroft, cheerily. "You are two friends of mine who are in want of a billet, and what could be more natural than that I should bring you both round to the managing director?"

"Quite so! Of course!" said Holmes. "I should like to have a look at the gentleman and see if I can make anything of his little game.

What qualities have you, my friend, which would make your services so valuable? or is it possible that——" he began biting his nails and staring blankly out of the window, and we hardly drew another word from him until we were in New Street.

At seven o'clock that evening we were walking, the three of us, down Corporation Street to the company's offices.

"It is of no use our being at all before our time," said our client. "He only comes there to see me apparently, for the place is deserted up to the very hour he names."

"That is suggestive," remarked Holmes.

"By Jove, I told you so!" cried the clerk. "That's he walking ahead of us there."

He pointed to a smallish, blond, well-dressed man, who was bustling along the other side of the road. As we watched him he looked across at a boy who was bawling out the latest edition of the evening paper, and, running over among the cabs and 'buses, he bought one from him. Then clutching it in his hand he vanished through a doorway.

"There he goes!" cried Hall Pycroft. "Those are the company's offices into which he has gone. Come with me and I'll fix it up as easily as possible."

Following his lead we ascended five stories, until we found ourselves outside a half-opened door, at which our client tapped. A voice within bade us "Come in," and we entered a bare, unfurnished room, such as Hall Pycroft had described. At the single table sat the man whom we had seen in the street, with his evening paper spread out in front of him, and as he looked up at us it seemed to me that I had never looked upon a face which bore such marks of grief, and of something beyond grief—of a horror such as comes to few men in a lifetime. His brow glistened with perspiration, his cheeks were of the dull dead white of a fish's belly, and his eyes were wild and staring. He looked at his clerk as though he failed to recognise him, and I could see, by the astonishment depicted upon our conductor's face, that this was by no means the usual appearance of his employer.

"You look ill, Mr. Pinner," he exclaimed.

"Yes, I am not very well," answered the other, making obvious efforts to pull himself together, and licking his dry lips before he spoke. "Who are these gentlemen whom you have brought with you?"

"One is Mr. Harris, of Bermondsey, and the other is Mr. Price, of this town," said our clerk, glibly. "They are friends of mine, and gentlemen of experience, but they have been out of a place for some little time, and they hoped that perhaps you might find an opening for them in the company's employment."

"Very possibly! Very possibly!" cried Mr. Pinner, with a ghastly smile. "Yes, I have no doubt that we shall be able to do something for you. What is your particular line, Mr. Harris?"

"I am an accountant," said Holmes.

"Ah, yes, we shall want something of the sort. And you, Mr. Price?"

"A clerk," said I.

"I have every hope that the company may accommodate you. I will let you know about it as soon as we come to any conclusion. And now I beg that you will go. For God's sake, leave me to myself!"

These last words were shot out of him, as though the constraint which he was evidently setting upon himself had suddenly and utterly burst asunder. Holmes and I glanced at each other, and Hall Pycroft took a step towards the table.

"You forget, Mr. Pinner, that I am here by appointment to receive some directions from you," said he.

"Certainly, Mr. Pycroft, certainly," the other answered in a calmer tone. "You may wait here a moment, and there is no reason why your friends should not wait with you. I will be entirely at your service in three minutes, if I might trespass upon your patience so far." He rose with a very courteous air, and bowing to us he passed out through a door at the farther end of the room, which he closed behind him.

"What now?" whispered Holmes. "Is he giving us the slip?"

"Impossible," answered Pycroft.

"Why so?"

"That door leads into an inner room."

"There is no exit?"

"None."

"Is it furnished?"

"It was empty yesterday."

"Then what on earth can he be doing? There is something which I don't understand in this matter. If ever a man was three parts mad with terror, that man's name is Pinner. What can have put the shivers on him?"

"He suspects that we are detectives," I suggested.

"That's it," said Pycroft.

Holmes shook his head. "He did not turn pale. He *was* pale when we entered the room," said he. "It is just possible that——"

His words were interrupted by a sharp rat-tat from the direction of the inner door.

"What the deuce is he knocking at his own door for?" cried the clerk.

Again and much louder came the rat-tat-tat. We all gazed expectantly at the closed door. Glancing at Holmes I saw his face turn rigid, and he leaned forward in intense excitement. Then suddenly came a low gurgling, gargling sound and a brisk drumming upon woodwork. Holmes sprang frantically across the room and pushed at the door. It was fastened on the inner side. Following his example, we threw ourselves upon it with all our weight. One hinge snapped, then the other, and down came the door with a crash. Rushing over it we found ourselves in the inner room.

It was empty.

But it was only for a moment that we were at fault. At one corner, the corner nearest the room which we had left, there was a second door. Holmes sprang to it and pulled it open. A coat and waistcoat were lying on the floor, and from a hook behind the door, with his own braces round his neck, was hanging the managing director of the Franco-Midland Hardware Company. His knees were drawn up, his head hung at a dreadful angle to his body, and the clatter of his heels against the door made the noise which had broken in upon our conversation. In an instant I had caught him round the waist and held him up, while Holmes and Pycroft untied the elastic bands which had disappeared between the livid creases of skin. Then we carried him into the other room, where he lay with a slate-coloured face, puffing his purple lips in and out with every breath—a dreadful wreck of all that he had been but five minutes before.

"What do you think of him, Watson?" asked Holmes.

I stooped over him and examined him. His pulse was feeble and intermittent, but his breathing grew longer, and there was a little shivering of his eyelids which showed a thin white slit of ball beneath.

"It has been touch and go with him," said I, "but he'll live now. Just open that window and hand me the water carafe." I undid his collar, poured the cold water over his face, and raised and sank his arms until he drew a long natural breath.

"It's only a question of time now," said I, as I turned away from him.

Holmes stood by the table with his hands deep in his trousers pockets and his chin upon his breast.

"I suppose we ought to call the police in now," said he; "and yet I confess that I like to give them a complete case when they come."

"It's a blessed mystery to me," cried Pycroft, scratching his head. "Whatever they wanted to bring me all the way up here for, and then——"

"Pooh! All that is clear enough," said Holmes, impatiently. "It is this last sudden move."

"You understand the rest, then?"

"I think that is fairly obvious. What do you say, Watson?"

I shrugged my shoulders.

"I must confess that I am out of my depths," said I.

"Oh, surely, if you consider the events at first they can only point to one conclusion."

"What do you make of them?"

"Well, the whole thing hinges upon two points. The first is the making of Pycroft write a declaration by which he entered the service of this preposterous company. Do you not see how very suggestive that is?"

"I am afraid I miss the point."

"Well, why did they want him to do it? Not as a business matter, for these arrangements are usually verbal, and there was no earthly business reason why this should be an exception. Don't you see, my young friend, that they were very anxious to obtain a specimen of your handwriting, and had no other way of doing it?"

"And why?"

"Quite so. Why? When we answer that, we have made some progress with our little problem. Why? There can be only one adequate reason. Some one wanted to learn to imitate your writing, and had to procure a specimen of it first. And now if we pass on to the second point, we find that each throws light upon the other. That point is the request made by Pinner that you should not resign your place, but should leave the manager of this important business in the full expectation that a Mr. Hall Pycroft, whom he had never seen, was about to enter the office upon the Monday morning."

"My God!" cried our client, "what a blind beetle I have been!"

"Now you see the point about the handwriting. Suppose that someone turned up in your place who wrote a completely different hand from that in which you had applied for the vacancy, of course the game would have been up. But in the interval the rogue learnt to imitate you, and his position was therefore secure, as I presume that nobody in the office had ever set eyes upon you?"

"Not a soul," groaned Hall Pycroft.

"Very good. Of course, it was of the utmost importance to prevent you from thinking better of it, and also to keep you from coming into contact with any one who might tell you that your double was at work in Mawson's office. Therefore they gave you a handsome advance on your salary, and ran you off to the Midlands, where they gave you enough work to do to prevent your going to London, where you might have burst their little game up. That is all plain enough."

"But why should this man pretend to be his own brother?"

"Well, that is pretty clear also. There are evidently only two of them in it. The other is personating you at the office. This one acted as your engager, and then found that he could not find you an employer without admitting a third person into his plot. That he was most unwilling to do. He changed his appearance as far as he could, and trusted that the likeness, which you could not fail to observe, would be put down to a family resemblance. But for the happy chance of the gold stuffing your suspicions would probably have never been aroused."

Hall Pycroft shook his clenched hands in the air. "Good Lord!" he cried. "While I have been fooled in this way, what has this other Hall Pycroft been doing at Mawson's? What should we do, Mr. Holmes? Tell me what to do!"

"We must wire to Mawson's."

"They shut at twelve on Saturdays."

"Never mind; there may be some doorkeeper or attendant——"

"Ah, yes; they keep a permanent guard there on account of the value of the securities that they hold. I remember hearing it talked of in the City."

"Very good, we shall wire to him, and see if all is well, and if a clerk of your name is working there. That is clear enough, but what is not so clear is why at sight of us one of the rogues should instantly walk out of the room and hang himself."

"The paper!" croaked a voice behind us. The man was sitting up, blanched and ghastly, with returning reason in his eyes, and hands which rubbed nervously at the broad red band which still encircled his throat.

"The paper! Of course!" yelled Holmes, in a paroxysm of excitement. "Idiot that I was! I thought so much of our visit that the paper never entered my head for an instant. To be sure the secret must lie there." He flattened it out on the table, and a cry of triumph burst from his lips.

"Look at this, Watson!" he cried. "It is a London paper, an early edition of the *Evening Standard*. Here is what we want. Look at the headlines: 'Crime in the City. Murder at Mawson and Williams'. Gigantic Attempted Robbery; Capture of the Criminal.' Here, Watson, we are all equally anxious to hear it, so kindly read it aloud to us."

It appeared from its position in the paper to have been the one event of importance in town, and the account of it ran in this way:

"A desperate attempt at robbery, culminating in the death of one man and the capture of the criminal, occurred this afternoon in the City. For some time back Mawson and Williams, the famous financial house, have been the guardians of securities which amount in the aggregate to a sum of considerably over a million sterling. So conscious was the manager of the responsibility which devolved upon him in consequence of the great interests at stake, that safes of the very latest construction have been employed, and an armed watchman has been left day and night in the building. It appears that last week a new clerk, named Hall Pycroft, was engaged by the firm. This person appears to have been none other than Beddington, the famous forger and cracksman, who, with his brother, has only recently emerged from a five years' spell of penal servitude. By some means, which are not yet clear, he succeeded in winning, under a false name, this official position in the office, which he utilized in order to obtain mouldings of various locks, and a thorough knowledge of the position of the strong room and the safes.

"It is customary at Mawson's for the clerks to leave at midday on Saturday. Sergeant Tuson, of the City Police, was somewhat surprised therefore to see a gentleman with a carpet bag come down the steps at twenty minutes past one. His suspicions being aroused, the sergeant followed the man, and with the aid of Constable Pollock succeeded, after a most desperate resistance, in arresting him. It was at once clear that a daring and gigantic robbery had been committed. Nearly a hundred thousand pounds' worth of American railway bonds, with a large amount of scrip in other mines and companies, were discovered in the bag. On examining the premises the body of the unfortunate watchman was found doubled up and thrust into the largest of the safes, where it would not have been discovered until Monday morning had it not been for the prompt action of Sergeant Tuson. The man's skull had been shattered by a blow from a poker, delivered from behind. There could be no doubt that Beddington had obtained entrance by pretending that he had left something behind him, and having murdered the watchman, rapidly rifled the large safe, and then made off with his booty. His brother, who usually works with him, has not appeared in this job, as far as can at present be ascertained, although the police are making energetic inquiries as to his whereabouts."

"Well, we may save the police some little trouble in that direction," said Holmes, glancing at the haggard figure huddled up by the window. "Human nature is a strange mixture, Watson. You see that even a villain and a murderer can inspire such affection that his brother turns to suicide when he learns that his neck is forfeited. However, we have no choice as to our action. The doctor and I will remain on guard, Mr. Pycroft, if you will have the kindness to step out for the police."

HORACE ANNESLEY VACHELL

(1861–)

HORACE ANNESLEY VACHELL was educated at Harrow and at the Royal Military College, Sandhurst. For some time he served with the Rifle Brigade. Later, for a while, he went to Canada. Among his many novels may be mentioned *Brothers* (1904), and, in the following year, *The Hill*, a story written round his old school. *Quinney's* (1914) was immensely popular, and he followed it with *Quinney's Adventures* (1924). He is also the author of several successful plays.

"The Paul Lamerie Cup," from *Quinney's Adventures*, is reprinted by kind permission of the author and Mr. John Murray.

THE PAUL LAMERIE CUP

I

QUINNEY gazed lovingly at a silver-gilt cup which stood upon his desk. The marks were almost obliterated but not quite. With the aid of a pocket lens he could make out a "C," and the leopard's head *erased*, and the figure of Britannia. These were enough to date the cup exactly. It had been made in 1718. Of far deeper interest was the maker's mark.

"It's a Paul Lamerie right enough," muttered the dealer.

And no vandal of a later period had touched it.

Quinney's lips watered at sight of it. This, in his opinion, was a "gem" of "purest ray serene." The cup had two handles and a top. The dealer ran his fingers over the sharp edges of the acanthus leaves upon the handles.

"What a craftsman," he thought.

Nevertheless he frowned as he gloated over it.

Queer objects are brought to famous dealers by queer people and at queer times. Some of the dealers ask questions; some don't. But, in the trade generally, it is admitted, not without reluctance, that questions ought to be asked and answered satisfactorily. Upon the previous evening a Frenchman had drifted into the Soho Square establishment, carrying a box. He had shown the cup to Quinney and, amazing fact, had left it with him. This might be a tribute to Quinney's reputation or merely a carefully considered ruse to establish confidence. But the Frenchman, who spoke English perfectly, had given another reason.

"I am staying at a hotel, Mr. Quinney. You have a safe. The cup will be more secure in your custody."

"Is it yours?" asked Quinney.

"Yes—it is mine. Your name was mentioned to me as a dealer to be trusted. I thought you might like to buy the cup or to sell it for me on commission."

The owner of the cup spoke with suave indifference.

Quinney was slightly puzzled. Occasionally he bought and sold valuable plate, but he dealt as a rule in furniture and porcelain, not disdaining, however, miniatures and pictures. He said curtly:

"Why didn't you go to one of the big silversmiths?"

The Frenchman shrugged his shoulders.

"But I don't know your big silversmiths. A friend of mine gave me your name. *Voilà!*"

As he spoke he laid a thin card upon the desk.

"Your card?" asked Quinney.

The Frenchman smiled.

"Perfectly; it is mine."

"If you leave the cup with me, you will want a receipt, eh?"

"That is quite unnecessary. I will do myself the pleasure of calling again to-morrow, at eleven. By that time, monsieur, you will, perhaps, have satisfied yourself in regard to the value of the cup."

Smilingly, he withdrew.

Upon the card, in small script, was inscribed:

Le Marquis de Chantal.

And in the corner of the card *Cercle Royal.*

Now Quinney had a good friend and patron, the Marquess of Mel, who happened to be in London at his house in St. James's Square. After his Gallic visitor had gone Quinney rang up that noble and puissant prince, and had a reassuring chat with him over the telephone. Lord Mel did not know Monsieur de Chantal, but he knew of him. He was the head of an ancient family, long established in La Vendée, and well known in Paris. It was quite likely that he possessed a Paul Lamerie cup, and he might wish to dispose of it quietly. Lord Mel concluded: "French plate fetches a ridiculous price in London, and it is probable that English plate is much undervalued in Paris."

Quinney thanked his kind patron for this enlightening information.

Next morning, when he examined the cup, he came to the conclusion that nothing out of the ordinary had taken place. Paul Lamerie had been the famous silversmith of his day. He had worked, it is true, most of his life in London, but some of his masterpieces must have been bought by Frenchmen. An ancestor of the marquis had bought the cup which an impoverished descendant wished to sell. To get the biggest price for so beautiful a specimen, it might have been wiser to put it up at Christie's. But that meant a publicity from which Monsieur de Chantal might shrink.

Quinney waited for him with impatience.

At eleven punctually the gentleman presented himself.

"Well," he asked, "what do you think of it?"

"It's a very handsome cup," said Quinney cautiously, "and it weighs nearly a hundred ounces, Troy."

"Do you care to buy it?"

"What do you ask for it, my lord?"

He was not quite sure whether a mere French marquis should be so addressed, but he deemed it expedient to be on the safe side.

"What do I ask? But I leave that to you. To set a price, I mean. Then I can take your money or—or take away the cup. It's a valuable piece of plate, but I have no *expertise* in your English plate. I come to you because my friends tell me you are to be trusted."

Quinney looked slightly disconcerted. Such awkward exigencies were not altogether new to him. And if he named too low a figure this aristocratic gentleman might smile sweetly, shake his handsome head, and vanish with the cup. But he had made up his mind what the cup was worth to him, and it was possible that the marquis had other objects of *vertu* which he might bring to a trustworthy dealer.

"I'll give five hundred pounds, not a penny more or less. But if I buy it I hope to get much more, you understand. I shall hang on to it till I do. That's my way of doing business, my lord. Sooner or later a customer comes along who pays my figure. Till then I have the pleasure of looking at a 'gem.' "

"I quite understand. For family reasons, Mr. Quinney, I do not wish to put my cup up at Christie's."

At this moment the telephone bell tinkled sharply.

"Please excuse me," said Quinney.

Monsieur de Chantal bowed. Quinney picked up the receiver and placed it to his ear. A second later he said with marked deference:

"The Duke of Bellingham has asked if you are here, my lord. His Grace wishes to speak to you."

"Ah, yes; I told him to ring me up."

Quinney then listened to the following:

"Is that you, my dear Bellingham? It is de Chantal speaking. Yes. I will lunch with you at Claridge's with pleasure. What? *No*, no—quite impossible. I'm returning to Paris to-night. *Bon! A tout-à-l'heure!*"

He hung up the 'phone and turned politely to Quinney.

"Very many thanks," he murmured. "What were we talking about? Ah! the cup, to be sure. You offer me five hundred. I will take your cheque on one condition: you will not make public the fact that I—I"—he slightly emphasised the personal pronoun—"have been compelled to part with my beloved cup. I have others, and it will hardly be missed at home, still——"

His pleasant voice melted upon a silence. Quinney nodded.

"That's quite all right."

The cheque was duly made out, and a receipt signed. The Frenchman left the sanctuary. From the Georgian windows, Quinney could see him step into a smart car.

"A good morning's work," said Quinney to himself, as he sat down to enjoy full possession of the Paul Lamerie cup.

II

HE was still admiring the superlative craftsmanship when Susan, his wife, came bustling into the sanctuary. Since the marriage of her daughter, Mrs. Quinney had interested herself in "waifs and strays," creatures of flesh and blood, in salient contrast to what she stigmatised as "sticks and stones"—the "things" beloved by the famous dealer.

"Look at that, Susie!"

Mrs. Quinney eyed the cup with malevolence. After long and sad experience, she was well aware that a new "first favourite" had just been enthroned in her lord's affections. Nevertheless, being a discreet woman, with an object in view that justified dissimulation, she said pleasantly:

"I *am* looking at it. You didn't get that given away with a packet o' tea, did you?"

"I paid five hundred pounds for it, old girl."

"And what will you sell it for, Joe?"

"May be, it's not for sale."

"Another idol, I suppose?"

"You're as near right as a woman can be. Makes me feel a younger and better man just to pass my fingers over it."

He caressed it lovingly, as he spoke. Susan sniffed and then smiled.

"I want some money out of you, Joe, for my Rags and Tatters Home. If you're really feeling younger and better, *and better*," she repeated, "you can afford to be generous."

"I shan't grudge a pound or two," said Quinney superbly.

"A pound or two. I want fifty pounds, Joe. That's a tenth of the profit you mean to make on that cup."

"Fifty pounds——! Dotty, you are——"

"Yes—we're two of a kind. You go crazy over graven images; I'm dotty, as you put it, over kiddies."

"Queen o' beggars, by gum!"

"Write me a nice cheque, Joe, and I won't bother you again for ever so long."

"For how long, Mrs. Stand-and-deliver?"

"Not till next month, Joe."

"And this is the twenty-ninth! It's a Paul Lamerie cup, old dear."

"Never heard of him."

"I dessay not," Quinney chuckled. "And the noble owner as was never heard of him neither."

"Noble owner?"

"French marquis."

"A Frenchy? I hope he came by it lawfully, Joe."

"Friend o' the Duke o' Bellingham. And a perfect gentleman. I ain't to be flimflammed by rogues, my girl. You can trust me."

"You *have* been had, Joe."

"When I was young and green, Susie. Now—you off it, and, perhaps, I'll give you a fiver."

Quinney locked up the cup and betook himself to Christie's. In the rooms he found, as he expected, an expert on plate, who displayed enthusiasm when he heard of the Paul Lamerie two-handled cup. Indeed, his interest was so challenged that he expressed a wish to see it.

"You can see it," said Quinney, "and we'll have a bite of the best ham in London afterwards."

"What did you fork out for it, Joe?"

"Ah! You can make a guess at that after you've looked at the beauty."

They walked back to Soho Square discoursing at length upon treasure trove and values.

As soon as the cup was taken from the safe, the expert congratulated Quinney solemnly, affirming that he had never beheld a finer specimen or one in better preservation.

"Where on earth did you find it?"

Quinney told the tale with gusto. The expert nodded.

"I can lay my hands on a collector who'll give you a whacking profit."

Quinney betrayed uneasiness.

"I can't bear the thought of selling it," he muttered.

Upon the cup was exquisitely engraved a coat of arms, with supporters, surmounted by a coronet. The expert said with authority:

"That's an English coat, Joe, with a ducal coronet."

"And what of it?" asked Quinney.

"Nothing, but if you have a peerage handy, we'll find out who owned that cup before it went to France."

"I have an old peerage," said Quinney.

"The older the better; you fetch it."

Within five minutes, the expert said triumphantly:

"We've got the whole thing here. This cup was made for the second Duke of Bellingham, and the aunt of the present duke married a Marquis de Chantal. Probably the cup was a wedding gift. You're in big luck, Joe. I don't mind telling you now that I didn't quite like your yarn about a Frenchman drifting in here with that cup. It sounded a bit fishy. And then his being rung up by the Duke of Bellingham. I shied at that, too. But your duke and marquis are cousins. Probably the duke told the young man to go to you."

"More 'n likely," assented Quinney. "I've told Susan again and again that a reputation for honesty is my biggest asset. Now—let's tackle the ham."

III

After luncheon two large cigars were smoked leisurely, and then Quinney found himself once more alone with his cup. At about three Lord Mel appeared. Quinney was not surprised. His kind patron often dropped in for a friendly chat, and he, too, was a connoisseur of old silver.

"I have come to tell you more about the Marquis de Chantal."

"You are very kind, my lord."

"I am feeling slightly uneasy."

"Uneasy?"

"He is not in London."

Cold shivers meandered up and down Quinney's spine.

"Not in London," he gasped.

"No; he is a sad cripple, a martyr to arthritis. He has not left his château in La Vendée for more than a year. A friend of mine at my club told me this after luncheon to-day, and fearing that something might be wrong I hastened here to you."

"How old is the Marquis de Chantal, my lord?"

"Over sixty, I should say."

"The young man who sold me the cup asked for a cheque. Ought I to stop that cheque?"

"Most assuredly—if you can."

But, alas! within a few minutes word came from the bank, over the 'phone, that a cheque signed by Joseph Quinney made payable to bearer had been cashed at five and twenty minutes to twelve that morning.

"You made it payable to bearer?" asked Lord Mel.

"He asked me to do so. And—and a few minutes before he had been talking over my 'phone with the Duke of Bellingham."

"Who is shooting in Westmorland, as I happen to know."

"I've been done," groaned Quinney, "crisp as a biscuit. The cup belonged to the second Duke of Bellingham. And an aunt of the present duke married the Marquis de Chantal. It's all in Burke, my lord."

"The cup, Quinney, must have been stolen. Probably by a clever rogue of a servant, who knew about the Bellingham connection and used his knowledge to good purpose. I can only suggest calling in the police at once."

"That means labelling myself as the biggest mug in the trade."

"It goes without saying that the cup will be missed and eventually claimed."

"I don't keep stolen goods, my lord. You know that."

"Everybody knows it, my dear fellow."

Lord Mel went away. Quinney sent for a particular friend of his, a private detective.

IV

The private detective looked like a prosperous suburban dentist. His eyes were mistily blue; he moved slowly; indeed, he was the last man to challenge attention in any company, which may have accounted for his success in an arduous profession.

He listened pensively to Quinney's story, asking no questions till the dealer had finished. Then he grasped the tale firmly:

"Let me see the receipt."

John Williams looked long and hard at the signature of René de Chantal.

"Not a first offence," he murmured.

"Hay?"

"He has signed his master's name before. I accept unreservedly Lord Mel's hypothesis. Only a trusted servant could have had access to such a valuable piece of plate. If the Marquis de Chantal is an invalid, probably he doesn't entertain. Such a cup might, presumably, be stolen and not missed for a long time. A servant could have possessed himself of the visiting card. A servant would have known of the Bellingham connection. He spoke, you say, perfect English. It is quite likely that he is English."

Mr. Williams relapsed into silence, whilst Quinney groaned.

"Let me see the visiting card, Mr. Quinney."

After careful inspection of the card, the oracle spoke again:

"The card is genuine enough."

"Anybody can have a card printed."

"Pardon me! This is a highly glazed card, beautifully engraved. We are dealing with no common thief. He may have stolen other articles of value, and he came to London—the best market. Describe his appearance to me as accurately as you can."

Quinney did so. Mr. Williams rose.

"I will report in an hour's time."

"He said he was returning to Paris to-night."

"I have made a mental note of that."

Left alone, Quinney summoned the faithful Susan. In no uncertain terms he bewailed his unhappy lot.

"Down and out I am, Susie. Time I retired——! Five hundred of the best——!"

"But, Joe, you have the cup."

"Ho! That's a good 'un from a reg'lar churchgoer."

"You paid your money for it and it's yours."

"No, it ain't, Mrs. Smarty. I've my reputation to think of. Lord Mel and others know all about the cup. There'll be a rare hullabaloo when it's missed."

"Maybe Mr. Williams'll catch him?"

"Not an unborn puppy's chance o' that."

Susan said obstinately:

"I say the cup's yours, Joe."

"Go it! Keep on a-sayin' it! You have the morals o' your waifs an' strays, you have. But I'll tell you this, Mrs. Stolen Goods: 'tisn't the loss o' the money that mads me. I can get that back by refusing to weigh in to your charities. No; it's bein' done, it's bein' had. And the press'll get hold of it. That fair tears me, old lass."

"No; it's losing the cup tears you, Joe. You'd sooner lose me, yes, you would."

"What a tale——!"

"You'd have worshipped the golden calf if Paul What's-his-name had made it."

Quinney scowled at her.

"I sent for you, Susan Quinney, because I wanted sympathy. That, seemin'ly, is not on tap. Now, I'll have a glass o' brown sherry."

"Drink the poison out o' that precious cup, I would."

"Right you are, Mrs. Pussyfoot. I will."

And with Susan's disdainful eye upon him he did.

V

In less than the appointed hour Mr. Williams returned, but his face betrayed neither hope nor despair as he said quietly:

"The man who sold you that cup has not left London, Mr. Quinney."

"Ho! Maybe you can take me to him. And then——"

"And then——?"

The muscles of Joe Quinney were contracted as he replied savagely:

"I'd like to hit him one on the jaw. His 'jaw' did me in. But you're a fair marvel, you are. How did you find him, hay? And where?"

"I told you that he was no common thief." Quinney nodded. "For example, he hired a smart car. You seem to have hired a smart office boy."

"That's me. I always get the best."

"Your office boy noticed the car and its number."

"Did he? That boy'll have his salary raised."

"I found out where the car came from, because the chauffeur wore a livery adopted by a firm that lets out smart cars to smart people."

"By gum! they ought to let out cars to you for nothing."

"It seems," continued Mr. Williams impassively, "that this car was hired by your man and sent to the hotel where he is stopping. He is there now. And he is leaving for Paris—so I understand—to-night."

"Not if I know meself," exclaimed Quinney. He jumped up, afire with excitement. "Come on, old lad. It's in me to down him harder than he downed me."

"Just so. A taxi is waiting for us downstairs."

"Where is the hotel?" asked Quinney.

Mr. Williams named a quiet old-fashioned hotel not far from St. James's Street. Upon the way thither, he added a few details. The young man had registered as René de Chantal. The people at the hotel had no suspicion that he was other than what he represented himself to be. He had arrived the day before from Paris. He had asked the manager of the hotel to provide a good car; he was occupying a sitting-room with bed and bathroom attached.

"He has, of course, an accomplice," said Mr. Williams. "The person who 'phoned him."

"Two gaol birds at one shot," said Quinney. His hair bristled; his eyes sparkled.

"You enjoy a scrap?" asked Mr. Williams.

"You bet! Don't you?"

"No; I have had too many of 'em."

"An old campaigner, hay? Well, what's the plan? Frontal attack, what?"

"My inquiries have been discreet," affirmed Mr. Williams. "No suspicions have been aroused. If our man is at home, we will have a quiet word with the manager before we attempt——"

"Violence," exploded Quinney.

"There will be no necessity, I hope, for violence. You want your money back."

"I want more than that, my lad."

"What else?"

"If we cop him fair and square, and land him in gaol, it will be the finest kind of 'ad' for me."

"As your confidential adviser, Mr. Quinney, I may point out to you that your first objective should be the recovery of the money."

"We'll have that first."

"Or what is left of it."

"He ain't had time to blow in much. I dessay he's looking forward to a beano in Paris."

"Possibly. His accomplice is a woman."

"What you say?"

"She is staying at the hotel as his wife."

Quinney assimilated this fresh information in stupefied silence. The taxi sped down a side street and stopped.

"Here we are," said Mr. Williams. "We will interview the manager first."

Quinney, mopping a fevered brow, followed his confidential adviser into a snug hall. A page ushered them into the presence of the manager. Very curtly and lucidly the facts in the case were stated by Mr. Williams.

After absorbing them, the manager said deprecatingly:

"The gentleman and his wife are upstairs now, having tea. This is a quiet hotel for quiet people. If—if matters could be arranged—quietly——?"

"Compoundin' a felony?" sputtered Quinney.

The manager shrugged his shoulders, glancing interrogatively at the confidential adviser.

"We don't know," said Mr. Williams lightly, "that this cup was stolen. This man may be acting for the real Marquis de Chantal."

"Then why does he steal his name?" asked Quinney. "Anyway, let me see him, alone. You can be handy, Williams, in the bathroom, hay? If this chap can satisfy me, there won't be any trouble, but," he set his square jaw, "I'll take a deal o' satisfying."

"I will show Mr. Quinney into the sitting-room," said the manager.

"Now you're talkin'."

Quinney stood up, clenching his fists. The manager opened the door, and began to ascend the thickly carpeted stairs.

"Announce me as Mr. Joseph Quinney, please."

The sitting-room was on the first floor.

"Mr. Joseph Quinney."

Quinney found himself face to face with a sparkling brunette. The door of the sitting-room closed. The pseudo marquis was not to be seen. Quinney stifled a groan, and silently cursed his confidential adviser. The sitting-room faced the street. Obviously, the bird, espying the taxi, had flown. The sparkling brunette, speaking with a French accent, said graciously:

"Ah! my hosband spoke to me of Mr. Quinnee. You will sit down, will you not, till he come."

Quinney obeyed, thinking to himself: "I shall sit here for some time." However, he said civilly:

"Your husband has gone out, madam?"

"Oh, no. He is ver' busy packing. You will drink a cup o' tea, no?"

Quinney confessed afterwards to his Susan that he was "rattled." Susan immediately leapt to the conclusion that the "accomplice" was good-looking, which, indeed, happened to be true. Quinney put it that she had "a way with her."

He declined the cup of tea, and asked to see madam's husband.

"You are in a hurry, Mr. Quinnee?"

"Not particularly, madam, but——"

"*Bon!* Monsieur de Chantal knows that tea is here. He will be delighted to see you. You make—how you say?—yes—an impression on my hosband, because you are so—so 'onest. I guess why you have come. You think that we have other things, no? that perhaps we might wish to sell to you."

"Have you?" asked Quinney bluntly. He was now alert and more at his ease. And he had noticed that the lady had spoken in a lower tone of voice.

"Alas! Yes. But you do not buy jewellery, hein?"

"I might," said Quinney cautiously.

The lady's voice became a whisper.

"I have some emeralds, Mr. Quinnee, beautiful emeralds. My hosband would be angry eef I sold them, but, between us two, I want to sell my emeralds because we are so poor. And you are so 'onest that, perhaps, you will tell me of some man, also 'onest, who might buy my emeralds."

Quinney nodded, hardly able to speak. The "ad" that would demonstrate to a wondering world that he was the cleverest as well as the honestest dealer in London flared in headlines before his eyes. He had the cup. By the exercise of a little tact he might get possession of the emeralds.

"Can I see them, madam?"

Madame smiled and lifted two pretty hands to her neck. From beneath what appeared to be a sable stole she unclasped a string of fine emeralds, which she handed confidingly to Quinney. He knew nothing about precious stones, but, if these were genuine, they must, he reckoned, be worth even more than the Paul Lamerie cup. He stared hard at them. As he did so, he heard what is called in stageland a "noise off."

"Put them in your pocket," commanded madame, in a hurried whisper.

The astounded Quinney did so, as the husband of madame entered the sitting-room from the bedroom. He advanced smilingly:

"Mr. Quinney? This is a pleasant surprise. I am charmed to see you."

Quinney replied doggedly:

"It was a big bit o' luck finding you in."

As he spoke he glanced uneasily at madame. He wanted to settle his account in full with monsieur, but madame was pouring out the tea, and smiling coquettishly at him, as much as to say: "We have a leetle secret between us, Mr. Quinnee, no?"

"Sit down and have a cup of tea."

"Mr. Quinnee does not drink tea," said madame, "but perhaps, René, you might tempt 'im with something stronger."

"Nothing for me," replied Quinney stoutly. Nevertheless he sat down, wondering what would happen next. The feel of the emeralds in his pocket fortified his resolution to play up and play the game.

"You want to see me on business, Mr. Quinney?"

"Yes—business."

"All in good time," murmured madame. "It is dreadful, isn't it, that we should have to do business on our honeymoon?"

"Honeymoon," repeated Quinney.

"Yes; we were married less than a week ago. You did not—how you say?—*spot* us as honeymooners, Mr. Quinnee?"

"Frankly, madam, I never suspected it."

"It is so nice of you to say that. But you are a nice man. That jumps to the eye."

Quinney moved uneasily in his chair. He failed to envisage this agreeable couple as gaol birds. And he had expected some indication of confusion. But monsieur remained quite as cool as his charming wife.

Monsieur said quietly:

"There is no reason, Mr. Quinney, why you shouldn't talk business before my wife. And your time, of course, is valuable."

"I'm up against the cleverest thieves in France," thought Quinney. He was glad that he had refused tea. Madame might have slipped something into it other than sugar or milk.

"My time is my own," growled Quinney, "and has been for many a year."

"You do not regret buying the cup?"

"No."

"Tell me—how did you discover this hotel? Perhaps I had scribbled the address upon my card?"

"I think you forgot to do that," said Quinney. He continued gruffly: "I want a little more information about the cup. That coat of arms, now. I found it in Burke's Peerage."

"Perfectly. Does it detract from the value of the cup?"

"Not at all."

"Then I don't quite understand——?"

"You will—presently."

At this, madame, being a woman of tact, got up, and so did Quinney.

"I leave you to your business, but I return. I, too, wish to talk business with Mr. Quinnee."

Her husband opened the bedroom door for her. As she passed through it, she smiled at him innocently. In the long ago Susan had bestowed just such a smile upon her Joe, albeit he was red-headed and freckled. The smile left Quinney confounded. He was apt to rush to conclusions; and he decided instantly that this pretty Frenchwoman was not a thief but the victim of a thief, who had beguiled her—the rascal!

"The game is up," said Quinney.

"Really? What game?"

"The game you are playing. I'll admit you're a player, but I'm not quite the damned fool you took me to be."

Monsieur lifted slightly supercilious brows.

Quinney went on:

"It would pay such a clever fellow as you are to be honest. I don't know much about French law, but in your country, I'm told, they 'reconstruct' a crime."

"You have not been misinformed. Pray go on!"

"I can reconstruct this crime. You wanted to marry a pretty innocent girl, and Joe Quinney is the last man to blame you for that."

"Thanks. So far you are correct."

"Matrimony comes expensive since the war." Monsieur bowed. "And you hadn't saved much. It occurred to your thoughtful mind that a valuable cup not used for many years wouldn't be missed, hay?"

"This is surprising but perfectly true."

"You knew, also, that London was your market?"

"I did."

"So, one night, when nobody was about, you slipped the cup into your suit case."

"You are reconstructing this crime admirably."

"When you took the cup, you took some emeralds."

"Emeralds? What can you know about the emeralds?"

"You don't deny you took them?"

"I don't. What of it?"

"I take my hat off to you, as the coolest card I've ever met. You ought to be serving your country."

"But I am, Mr. Quinney. And I hope to serve your country, too."

"You may," said Quinney grimly.

"I confess," said monsieur, not so patiently, "that I'm utterly at a loss to understand you. You seem to take the most extraordinary and well-informed interest in my private affairs, which assuredly do not concern you. Your time, obviously, is not valuable, but mine is. I wish you good day, Mr. Quinney."

"You're a cock o' the game," said Quinney, almost admiringly, "but if I leave this room before I've settled in full with you, the police will come in. Climb down, young feller, climb down."

But, to his immense surprise, the "young feller" burst into fits of uncontrollable laughter. When this had partially subsided, he crossed to the telephone, and spoke down it.

"Please ring up the French Embassy for me."

Then he turned, still laughing, to Quinney.

"I perceive, Mr. Quinney, that this is a case of mistaken identity. When the French Embassy ring us up, I want you to ask them if they know the Marquis de Chantal, and the name of the hotel where he is staying in London. You may have to wait a few minutes."

"The Marquis de Chantal is an old man, crippled with arthritis, who has not left his house for a year."

"Ah! Light is coming to me. My father died three months ago. I have succeeded to a large and impoverished estate. I am also in the diplomatic service and hope to be attached to our embassy here. If you are feeling as warm as you look, may I offer you a whisky and soda?"

"P-p-please," stammered Quinney.

VI

The French Embassy "got through" before the whisky and soda, and the shamefaced Quinney was constrained by a still laughing Frenchman to ask the necessary questions. Then he said hurriedly:

"I shall have to tell my wife about this, my lord, but don't tell yours."

"I agree."

"I'd like to make a bolt of it before she comes back."

The Marquis de Chantal held out his hand.

"If you insist——!"

Quinney moved to the door. And then he remembered the emeralds.

"Her ladyship wanted to speak to me on business."

"So she did. Wait!"

He opened the bedroom door and called to madame, who appeared at once.

"I heard you laughing, René. What was the joke?"

"Mr. Quinney was reconstructing a crime for me, but the criminal escaped, and so do I."

Still laughing, he vanished. Quinney pulled out the emeralds and returned them to their owner.

"You mustn't sell these, madam. You can take it from me that your husband will be an ambassador some day, and then you'll need 'em. I wish you both the best of luck."

For the second time Quinney moved to the door and paused.

"Excuse the question, madam, but did you lunch with the Duke of Bellingham at Claridge's to-day?"

"Yes, we did. But—why?"

"Nothing. I was told that his Grace was in Westmorland."

"Yes; but he came down to see us. My husband is his first cousin, you know."

"I know," said Quinney, retreating swiftly.

He was rather "short" in explaining matters to Mr. Williams and the manager, but he had recovered his equanimity when he met Susan. After gratifying to the full a wife's curiosity, he observed cheerfully: "All's well that ends well. The cup is mine, Susie, *and it ain't for sale!*"

He was standing in the sanctuary, with the lights full on, staring at the cup as he spoke. Susan slipped to his desk, and pulled out a cheque-book.

"Now what are you up to?"

Susan opened the cheque-book, dipped a pen into ink, and handed it, coaxingly, to her lord.

"Make it fifty, Joe, and then nobody'll ever know."

"Shut your eyes, old lass!"

She did so; Quinney filled in the cheque, and slipped it into her hand.

"Look!"

"Joe——!"

"Yes; man o' surprises I am. You didn't half know your luck when you married me."

The cheque for the Waifs and Strays was filled in for a hundred pounds.

W. W. JACOBS

(1863–   )

WILLIAM WYMARK JACOBS is a native of London. Educated privately, he entered the Savings Bank Department of the Civil Service, where he served in the General Post Office from 1883 to 1899. His first book, *Many Cargoes* (1896), established his reputation, and a steady flow of plays, novels, and stories has been the outcome of a busy pen from that day to this.

"An Odd Freak," from *Light Freights* (1901), is reprinted by kind permission of the author.

AN ODD FREAK

"SPEAKING o' money," said the night-watchman, thoughtfully, as he selected an empty soap-box on the wharf for a seat, "the whole world would be different if we all 'ad more of it. It would be a brighter and a 'appier place for everybody."

He broke off to open a small brass tobacco-box and place a little quid of tobacco tenderly into a pouch in his left cheek, critically observing at the same time the efforts of a somewhat large steamer to get alongside the next wharf without blocking up more than three-parts of the river. He watched it as though the entire operation depended upon his attention, and, the steamer fast, he turned his eyes back again and resumed his theme.

"Of course it's the being short that sharpens people," he admitted, thoughtfully; "the sharpest man I ever knew never 'ad a h'apenny in 'is pocket, and the ways 'e had o' getting other chaps to pay for 'is beer would ha' made 'is fortin at the law if 'e'd only 'ad the eddication. Playful little chap 'e was. I've seen men wot didn't know 'im stand 'im a pot o' beer and then foller 'im up the road to see 'im knock down a policeman as 'e'd promised. They'd foller 'im to the fust policeman 'e met, an' then 'e'd point them out and say they were goin' to half kill 'im, an' the policeman 'ud just stroll up an' ask 'em wot they were 'anging about for, but I never 'eard of a chap telling 'im. They used to go away struck all of a 'eap. He died in the accident ward of the London Horsepittle, poor chap."

He shook his head thoughtfully, and ignoring the statement of the watchman at the next wharf that it was a fine evening, shifted his quid and laughed rumblingly.

"The funniest way o' raising the wind I ever 'eard of," he said, in explanation, "was one that 'appened about fifteen years ago. I'd just taken my discharge as A.B. from the *North Star*, trading between here and the Australian ports, and the men wot the thing 'appened to was shipmates o' mine, although on'y firemen.

"I know it's a true story, becos I was in it a little bit myself, and the other part I 'ad from all of 'em, and besides, they didn't see anything funny in it at all, or anything out of the way. It seemed to them quite a easy way o' making money, and I dessay if it 'ad come off all right I should have thought so too.

"In about a week arter we was paid off at the Albert Docks these chaps was all cleaned out, and they was all in despair, with a thirst wot wasn't half quenched and a spree wot was on'y in a manner o' speaking just begun, and at the end of that time they came round to a room wot I 'ad, to see wot could be done. There was four of 'em in all: old Sam Small, Ginger Dick, Peter Russet, and a orphan nevy of Sam's whose father and mother was dead. The mother 'ad been 'alf nigger an' 'alf Malay when she was living, and Sam was always perticklер careful to point out that his nevy took arter 'er. It was enough to make the pore woman turn in 'er grave to say so, but Sam used to say that 'e owed it to 'is brother to explain.

" 'Wot's to be done?' ses Peter Russet, arter they'd all said wot miserable chaps they was, an' 'ow badly sailor-men was paid. 'We're all going to sign on in the *Land's End*, but she doesn't sail for a fortnight; wot's to be done in the meantime for to live?'

" 'There's your watch, Peter,' ses old Sam, dreamy-like, 'and there's Ginger's ring. It's a good job you kep' that ring, Ginger. We're all in the same boat, mates, an' I on'y wish as I'd got something for the general good. It's 'aving an orphan nevy wot's kep' me pore.'

" 'Stow it,' ses the nevy, short-like.

" 'Everything's agin us,' ses old Sam. 'There's them four green parrots I brought from Brazil, all dead.'

" 'So are my two monkeys,' ses Peter Russet, shaking 'is 'ead; 'they used to sleep with me, too.'

"They all shook their 'eads then, and Russet took Sam up very sharp for saying that p'r'aps if he 'adn't slep' with the monkeys they wouldn't ha' died. He said if Sam knew more about monkeys than wot 'e did, why didn't 'e put 'is money in them instead o' green parrots wot pulled their feathers out and died of cold.

" 'Talking about monkeys,' ses Ginger Dick, interrupting old Sam suddenly, 'wot about young Beauty here?'

" 'Well, wot about him?' ses the nevy, in a nasty sort of way.

" 'W'y, 'e's worth forty monkeys an' millions o' green parrots,' ses Ginger, starting up; 'an' here 'e is a-wasting of 'is opportunities, going about dressed like a Christian. Open your mouth, Beauty, and stick your tongue out and roll your eyes a bit.'

" 'W'y not leave well alone, Ginger?' ses Russet; and I thought so too. Young Beauty was quite enough for me without that.

" 'Ter 'blige me,' ses Ginger, anxiously, 'just make yourself as ugly as wot you can, Beauty.'

" 'Leave 'im alone,' ses old Sam, as his nevy snarled at 'em. 'You ain't everybody's money yourself, Ginger.'

" 'I tell you, mates,' ses Ginger, speaking very slow and solemn, 'there's a fortin in 'im. I was lookin' at 'im just now, trying to think who 'e reminded me of. At fust I thought it was that big stuffed monkey we saw at Melbourne, then I suddenly remembered it was a wild man of Borneo I see when I was a kid up in Sunderland. When I say 'e was a 'andsome, good-'arted looking gentleman alongside o' you, Beauty, do you begin to get my meaning?'

" 'Wot's the idea, Ginger?' ses Sam, getting up to lend me and Russet a 'and with 'is nevy.

" 'My idea is this,' ses Ginger: 'take 'is cloes off 'im and dress 'im up in that there winder-blind, or something o' the kind; tie 'im up with a bit o' line, and take 'im round to Ted Reddish in the 'Ighway and sell 'im for a 'undered quid as a wild man of Borneo.'

" '*Wot?*' screams Beauty, in an awful voice. 'Let go, Peter; let go, d'ye hear?'

" ''Old your noise, Beauty, while your elders is speaking,' ses 'is uncle, and I could see 'e was struck with the idea.

" 'You jest try dressing me up in a winder-blind,' ses his nevy, half-crying with rage.

" 'Listen to reason, Beauty,' ses Ginger; 'you'll 'ave your share of the tin; it'll only be for a day or two, and then when we've cleared out you can make your escape, and there'll be twenty-five pounds for each of us.'

" ''Ow do you make that out, Ginger?' ses Sam, in a cold voice.

" 'Fours into a 'undered,' ses Ginger.

" 'Ho,' ses Sam. 'Ho, indeed. I wasn't aweer that 'e was your nevy, Ginger.'

" 'Share and share alike,' ses Russet. 'It's a very good plan o' yours, Ginger.'

"Ginger holds 'is 'ead up and looks at 'im 'ard.

" 'I thought o' the plan,' 'e ses, speaking very slow and deliberate. 'Sam's 'is uncle, and 'e's the wild man. Threes into a 'undered go——'

" 'You needn't bother your fat 'ead adding up sums, Ginger,' ses Russet, very polite. 'I'm going to 'ave my share; else I'll split to Ted Reddish.'

"None of 'em said a word about me: two of 'em was sitting on my bed; Ginger was using a 'an'kerchief o' mine wot 'e found in the fireplace, and Peter Russet 'ad 'ad a drink out o' the jug on my wash-stand, and yet they never even mentioned me. That's firemen all over, and that's 'ow it is they get themselves so disliked.

"It took 'em best part of an 'our to talk round young Beauty, an' the langwidge they see fit to use made me thankful to think that the parrots didn't live to l'arn it.

"You never saw anything like Beauty when they 'ad finished with 'im. If 'e was bad in 'is cloes, 'e was a perfeck horror without 'em. Ginger Dick faked 'im up beautiful, but there was no pleasing 'im. Fust 'e found fault with the winder-blind, which 'e said didn't fit; then 'e grumbled about going barefoot, then 'e wanted somethink to 'ide 'is legs, which was natural considering the shape of 'em. Ginger Dick nearly lost 'is temper with 'im, and it was all old Sam could do to stop himself from casting 'im off for ever. He was finished at last, and arter Peter Russet 'ad slipped downstairs and found a bit o' broken clothes-prop in the yard, and 'e'd been shown 'ow to lean on it and make a noise, Ginger said as 'ow if Ted Reddish got 'im for a 'undered pounds 'e'd get 'im a bargain.

" 'We must 'ave a cab,' ses old Sam.

" 'Cab?' ses Ginger. 'What for?'

" 'We should 'ave half Wapping following us,' ses Sam. 'Go out and put your ring up, Ginger, and fetch a cab.'

"Ginger started grumbling, but he went, and presently came back with the cab and the money, and they all went downstairs leading the wild man by a bit o' line. They only met one party coming up, and 'e seemed to remember somethink 'e'd forgotten wot ought to be fetched at once.

"Ginger went out fust and opened the cab-door, and then stood there waiting becos at the last moment the wild man said the winder-blind was slipping down. They got 'im out at last, but before 'e could get in the cab was going up the road at ten miles an hour, with Ginger 'anging on to the door calling to it to stop.

"It came back at about a mile an' a 'alf an hour, an' the remarks of the cabman was eggstrordinary. Even when 'e got back 'e wouldn't start till 'e'd got double fare paid in advance; but they got in at last and drove off.

"There was a fine scene at Ted Reddish's door. Ginger said that if there was a bit of a struggle it would be a good advertisement for Ted Reddish, and they might p'r'aps get more than a 'undered, and all the three of 'em could do, they couldn't get the wild man out o' that cab, and the cabman was hopping about 'arf crazy. Every now and then they'd get the wild man 'arf out, and then he'd get in agin and snarl. 'E didn't seem to know when to leave off, and Ginger and the others got almost as sick of it as the cabman. It must ha' taken two years' wear out o' that cab, but they got 'im out at last, and Reddish's door being open to see what the row was about, they went straight in.

" 'Wot's all this?' ses Reddish, who was a tall, thin man, with a dark moustache.

" 'It's a wild man o' Borneo,' ses Ginger, panting; 'we caught 'im in a forest in Brazil, an' we've come 'ere to give you the fust offer.'

"Ted Reddish was so surprised 'e couldn't speak at fust. The wild man seemed to take 'is breath away, and 'e looked in a 'elpless kind o' way at 'is wife, who'd just come down. She was a nice-lookin' woman, fat, with a lot o' yaller hair, and she smiled at 'em as though she'd known 'em all their lives.

" 'Come into the parlour,' she ses, kindly, just as Ted was beginning to get 'is breath.

"They followed 'em in, and the wild man was just going to make hisself comfortable in a easy-chair, when Ginger give 'im a look, an' 'e curled up on the 'earthrug instead.

" ''E ain't a very fine specimen,' ses Ted Reddish at last.

" 'It's the red side-whiskers I don't like,' ses his wife. 'Besides, who ever 'eard of a wild man in a collar an' necktie?'

" 'You've got hold o' the wrong one,' ses Ted Reddish, afore Ginger Dick could speak up for hisself.

" 'Oh, I beg your pardin,' ses Mrs. Reddish to Ginger, very polite. 'I thought it was funny a wild man should be wearing a collar. It's my mistake. That's the wild man, I s'pose, on the 'earthrug?'

" 'That's 'im, mum,' ses old Sam, very short.

" 'He don't look wild enough,' ses Reddish.

" 'No; 'e's much too tame,' ses 'is wife, shaking her yaller curls.

"The chaps all looked at each other then, and the wild man began to think it was time he did somethink; and the nearest thing 'andy being Ginger's leg, 'e put 'is teeth into it. *Anybody* might ha' thought Ginger was the wild man then, the way 'e went on, and Mrs. Reddish said that even if he so far forgot hisself as to use sich langwidge afore 'er, 'e oughtn't to before a poor 'eathen animal.

" 'How much do you want for 'im?' ses Ted Reddish, arter Ginger 'ad got 'is leg away, and taken it to the winder to look at it.

" 'One 'undered pounds,' ses old Sam.

"Ted Reddish looked at 'is wife, and they both larfed as though they'd never leave orf.

" 'Why, the market price o' the best wild men is only thirty shillings,' ses Reddish, wiping 'is eyes. 'I'll give you a pound for 'im.'

"Old Sam looked at Russet, and Russet looked at Ginger, and then *they* all larfed.

" 'Well, there's no getting over you, I can see that,' ses Reddish, at last. 'Is 'e strong?'

" 'Strong? Strong ain't the word for it,' ses Sam.

" 'Bring 'im to the back and let 'im 'ave a wrestle with one of the brown bears, Ted,' ses 'is wife.

" ''E'd kill it,' ses old Sam, hastily.

" 'Never mind,' ses Reddish, getting up; 'brown bears is cheap enough.'

"They all got up then, none of 'em knowing wot to do, except the wild man, that is, and *he* got 'is arms tight round the leg o' the table.

" 'Well,' ses Ginger, 'we'll be pleased for 'im to wrestle with the bear, but we must 'ave the 'undered quid fust, in case 'e injures 'isself a little.'

"Ted Reddish looked 'ard at 'im, and then he looked at 'is wife agin.

" 'I'll just go outside and talk it over with the missus,' he ses, at last, and they both got up and went out.

" 'It's all right,' ses old Sam, winking at Ginger.

" 'Fair cop,' ses Ginger, who was still rubbing his leg. 'I told you it would be, but there's no need for Beauty to overdo it. He nearly 'ad a bit out o' my leg.'

" 'A'right,' ses the wild man, shifting along the 'earthrug to where Peter was sitting; 'but it don't do for me to be too tame. You 'eard wot she said.'

" 'How are you feeling, old man?' ses Peter, in a kind voice, as 'e tucked 'is legs away under 'is chair.

" '*Gurr,*' ses the wild man, going on all fours to the back of the chair, '*gur—wug—wug.*'

" 'Don't play the fool, Beauty,' ses Peter, with a uneasy smile, as he twisted 'is 'ead round. 'Call 'im off, Sam.'

" '*Gurr,*' ses the wild man, sniffing at 'is legs; '*gurr.*'

" 'Easy on, Beauty, it's no good biting 'im till they come back,' ses old Sam.

" 'I won't be bit at all,' ses Russet, very sharp, 'mind that, Sam. It's my belief Beauty's gone mad.'

" 'Hush,' ses Ginger, and they 'eard Ted Reddish and 'is wife coming back. They came in and sat down agin, and after Ted 'ad 'ad another good look at the wild man and prodded 'im all over an' looked at 'is teeth, he spoke up and said they'd decided to give a 'undered pun for 'im at the end o' three days if 'e suited.

" 'I s'pose,' ses Sam, looking at the others, 'that we could 'ave a bit of it now to go on with?'

" 'It's agin our way of doing business,' ses Ted Reddish. 'If it 'ud been a lion or a tiger we could, but wild men we never do.'

" 'The thing is,' ses Mrs. Reddish, as the wild man started on Russet's leg and was pulled off by Sam and Ginger, 'where to put 'im.'

" 'Why not put 'im in with the black leopard?' ses her 'usband.

" 'There's plenty o' room in 'is cage,' says 'is wife, thoughtfully, 'and it 'ud be company for 'im too.'

" 'I don't think the wild man 'ud like that,' ses Ginger.

" 'I'm sartain sure 'e wouldn't,' says old Sam, shaking 'is 'ead.

" 'Well, we must put 'im in a cage by hisself, I s'pose,' ses Reddish, 'but we can't be put to much expense. I'm sure the money we spent in cat's meat for the last wild man we 'ad was awful.'

" 'Don't you spend too much money on cat's meat for *'im,*' ses Sam, ''e'd very likely leave it. Bringing 'im 'ome, we used to give 'im the same as we 'ad ourselves, and 'e got on all right.'

" 'It's a wonder you didn't kill 'im,' ses Reddish, severely. 'He'll be fed very different 'ere, I can tell you. You won't know 'im at the end o' three days.'

" 'Don't change 'im too sudden,' ses Ginger, keeping 'is 'ead turned away from the wild man wot wos trying to catch 'is eye. 'Cook 'is food at fust, 'cos 'e's been used to it.'

" 'I know wot to give 'im,' ses Reddish, offhandedly. 'I ain't been in the line twenty-seven years for nothink. Bring 'im out to the back, an' I'll put 'im in 'is new 'ome.'

"They all got up and, taking no notice of the wild man's whispers, follered Ted Reddish and 'is wife out to the back, where all the wild beasts in the world seemed to 'ave collected to roar out to each other what a beastly place it was.

" 'I'm going to put 'im in " 'Appy Cottage" for a time,' says Reddish; 'lend a hand 'ere, William,' he says, beckoning to one of 'is men.

" 'Is *that* " 'Appy Cottage"?' ses old Sam, sniffing, as they got up to a nasty, empty cage with a chain and staple in the wall.

"Ted Reddish said it was.

" 'Wot makes you call it that?' ses Sam.

"Reddish didn't seem to 'ear 'im, and it took all Ginger's coaxing to get Beauty to go in.

" 'It's on'y for a day or two,' he whispers.

" 'But 'ow am I to escape when you've got the brass?' ses the wild man.

" 'We'll look arter that,' ses Ginger, who 'adn't got the least idea.

"The wild man 'ad a little show for the last time, jist to impress Ted Reddish, an' it was pretty to see the way William 'andled 'im. The look on the wild man's face showed as 'ow it was a revelashun to *'im*. Then 'is three mates took a last look at 'im and went off.

"For the fust day Sam felt uneasy about 'im, and used to tell us tales about 'is dead brother which made us think Beauty was lucky to take arter 'is mother; but it wore off, and the next night, in the 'Admiral Cochrane,' 'e put 'is 'ead on Ginger's shoulder, and wep' for 'appiness as 'e spoke of 'is nevy's home at ' 'Appy Cottage.'

"On the third day Sam was for going round in the morning for the money, but Ginger said it wasn't advisable to show any 'aste; so they left it to the evening, and Peter Russet wrote Sam a letter signed 'Barnum,' offering 'im two 'undered for the wild man, in case Ted Reddish should want to beat 'im down. They all 'ad a drink before they went in, and was smiling with good temper to sich an extent that they 'ad to wait a minute to get their faces straight afore going in.

" 'Come in,' ses Reddish, and they follered 'im into the parler, where Mrs. Reddish was sitting in a armchair shaking 'er 'ead and looking at the carpet very sorrowful.

" 'I was afraid you'd come,' she ses, in a low voice.

" 'So was I,' ses Reddish.

" 'What for?' ses old Sam. It didn't look much like money, and 'e felt cross.

" 'We've 'ad a loss,' ses Mrs. Reddish. She touched 'erself, and then they see she was all in black, and that Ted Reddish was wearing a black tie and a bit o' crape round 'is arm.

" 'Sorry to 'ear it mum,' ses old Sam.

" 'It was very sudden, too,' ses Mrs. Reddish, wiping 'er eyes.

" 'That's better than laying long,' ses Peter Russet, comforting-like.

"Ginger Dick give a cough. 'Twenty-five pounds was wot *'e'd* come for; not to 'ear this sort o' talk.'

" 'We've been in the wild-beast line seven-an'-twenty years,' ses Mrs. Reddish, 'and it's the fust time anythink of this sort 'as 'appened.'

" ' 'Ealthy family, I s'pose,' ses Sam, staring.

" 'Tell 'im, Ted,' ses Mrs. Reddish, in a 'usky whisper.

" 'No, you,' ses Ted.

" 'It's your place,' ses Mrs. Reddish.

" 'A woman can break it better,' ses 'er 'usband.

" 'Tell us wot?' ses Ginger, very snappish.

"Ted Reddish cleared his throat.

" 'It wasn't our fault,' he ses, slowly, while Mrs. Reddish began to cry agin; 'gin'rally speakin' animals is afraid o' wild men, and night before last, as the wild man wot you left on approval didn't seem to like " 'Appy Cottage," we took 'im out an' put 'im in with the tiger.'

" 'Put him in with the WOT?' ses the unfort'nit man's uncle, jumping off 'is chair.

" 'The tiger,' ses Reddish. 'We 'eard somethink in the night, but we thought they was only 'aving a little bit of a tiff, like. In the morning I went down with a bit o' cold meat for the wild man, and I thought at first he'd escaped; but looking a bit closer——"

" 'Don't, Ted,' ses 'is wife. 'I can't bear it.'

" 'Do you mean to tell me that the tiger 'as eat 'im?' screams old Sam.

" 'Most of 'im,' ses Ted Reddish; 'but 'e couldn't ha' been much of a wild man to let a tiger get the better of 'im. I must say I was surprised.'

" 'We both was,' ses Mrs. Reddish, wiping 'er eyes.

"You might ha' 'eard a pin drop; old Sam's eyes was large and staring, Peter Russet was sucking 'is teeth, an' Ginger was wondering wot the law would say to it—if it 'eard of it.

" 'It's an unfortunit thing for all parties,' ses Ted Reddish, at last, getting up and standing on the 'earthrug.

" ' 'Orrible,' ses Sam, 'uskily. 'You ought to ha' known better than to put 'im in with a tiger. Wot could you expect? W'y, it was a mad thing to do.'

" 'Crool thing,' ses Peter Russet.

" 'You don't know the bisness properly,' ses Ginger, 'that's about wot it is. W'y, *I* should ha' known better than that.'

" 'Well, it's no good making a fuss about it,' ses Reddish. 'It was only a wild man arter all, and he'd ha' died anyway, cos 'e wouldn't eat the raw meat we gave 'im, and 'is pan o' water was scarcely touched. He'd ha' starved himself anyhow. I'm sorry, as I said before, but I must be off; I've got an appointment down at the docks.'

"He moved towards the door; Ginger Dick gave Russet a nudge and whispered something, and Russet passed it on to Sam.

" 'What about the 'undered quid?' ses pore Beauty's uncle, catching 'old o' Reddish as 'e passed 'im.

" 'Eh?' ses Reddish, surprised. 'Oh, that's off.'

" 'Ho!' says Sam. 'Ho! is it? We want a 'undered quid off of you; an' wot's more, we mean to 'ave it.'

" 'But the tiger's ate 'im,' says Mrs. Reddish, explaining.

" 'I know that,' ses Sam, sharply. 'But 'e was our wild man, and we want to be paid for 'im. You should ha' been more careful. We'll give you five minutes; and if the money ain't paid by that time, we'll go straight off to the police station.'

" 'Well, go,' ses Ted Reddish.

"Sam got up, very stern, and looked at Ginger.

" 'You'll be ruined if we do,' ses Ginger.

" 'All right,' ses Ted Reddish, comfortably.

" 'I'm not sure they can't 'ang you,' ses Russet.

" 'I ain't sure either,' ses Reddish; 'and I'd like to know 'ow the law stands, in case it 'appens agin.'

"Come on, Sam,' ses Ginger; 'come straight to the police station.'

"He got up, and moved towards the door. Ted Reddish didn't move a muscle, but Mrs. Reddish flopped on her knees and caught old Sam round the legs, and 'eld him so's 'e couldn't move.

" 'Spare 'im,' she ses, crying.

" 'Lea' go o' my legs, mum,' ses Sam.

" 'Come on, Sam,' ses Ginger; 'come to the police.'

"Old Sam made a desperit effort, and Mrs. Reddish called 'im a crool monster, and let go and 'id 'er face on 'er husband's shoulder as they all moved out of the parlour, larfing like a mad thing with hysterics.

"They moved off slowly, not knowing wot to do, as, of course, they knew they daren't go to the police about it. Ginger Dick's temper was awful; but Peter Russet said they mustn't give up all 'ope—he'd write to Ted Reddish and tell 'im as a friend wot a danger 'e was in. Old

Sam didn't say anything, the loss of his nevy and twenty-five pounds at the same time being almost more than 'is 'art could bear, and in a slow, melancholy fashion they walked back to old Sam's lodgings.

"'Well, what the blazes is up now?' ses Ginger Dick, as they turned the corner.

"There was three or four 'undered people standing in front of the 'ouse, and women's 'eads out of all the winders screaming their 'ardest for the police, and as they got closer they 'eard a incessant knocking. It took 'em nearly five minutes to force their way through the crowd, and then they nearly went crazy as they saw the wild man with 'alf the winder-blind missing, but otherwise well and 'arty, standing on the step and giving rat-a-tat-tats at the door for all 'e was worth.

"They never got to know the rights of it, Beauty getting so excited every time they asked 'im 'ow he got on that they 'ad to give it up. But they began to 'ave a sort of idea at last that Ted Reddish 'ad been 'aving a game with 'em, and that Mrs. Reddish was worse than wot 'e was."

W. J. LOCKE

(1863–1930)

WILLIAM JAMES LOCKE was appointed Secretary of the Royal Institute of British Architects in 1897, and occupied that position for ten years, when he gave it up in order to devote himself exclusively to literature. From the publication of *At the Gate of Samaria* (1895) his popularity steadily increased, until he became one of the most widely read novelists in the world. Among his great successes are *The Morals of Marcus Ordeyne* (1905), *The Beloved Vagabond* (1906), *The Fortunate Youth* (1914), and *The Great Pandolfo* (1925).

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THE ADVENTURE OF THE FAIR PATRONNE

IN narrating these few episodes in the undulatory, not to say switchback, career of my friend Aristide Pujol, I can pretend to no chronological sequence. Some occurred before he (almost literally) crossed my path for the first time, some afterwards. They have been related to me haphazard at odd times, together with a hundred other incidents, just as a chance tag of association recalled them to his swift and picturesque memory. He would, indeed, make a show of fixing dates by reference to his temporary profession; but so Protean seem to have been his changes of fortune in their number and rapidity that I could never keep count of them or their order. Nor does it matter. The man's life was as disconnected as a pack of cards.

My first meeting with him happened in this wise.

I had been motoring in a listless, solitary fashion about Languedoc. A friend who had stolen a few days from anxious business in order to accompany me from Boulogne through Touraine and Guienne had left me at Toulouse; another friend whom I had arranged to pick up at Avignon on his way from Monte Carlo was unexpectedly delayed. I was therefore condemned to a period of solitude somewhat irksome to a man of a gregarious temperament. At first, for company's sake, I sat in front by my chauffeur, McKeogh. But McKeogh, an atheistical Scotch mechanic with his soul in his cylinders, being as communicative as his own differential, I soon relapsed into the equal loneliness and greater comfort of the back.

In this fashion I left Montpellier one morning on my leisurely eastward journey, deciding to break off from the main road, striking due south, and visit Aigues-Mortes on the way.

Aigues-Mortes was once a flourishing Mediterranean town. St. Louis and his Crusaders sailed thence twice for Palestine; Charles V and Francis I met there and filled the place with glittering state. But now its glory has departed. The sea has receded three or four miles, and left it high and dry in the middle of bleak salt marshes, useless, dead, and desolate, swept by the howling mistral and scorched by the blazing sun. The straight white ribbon of road which stretched for miles through the plain, between dreary vineyards—some under water, the black shoots of the vines appearing like symmetrical wreckage above the surface—was at last swallowed up by the grim central gateway of the town, surmounted by its frowning tower. On each side spread the brown machicolated battlements that vainly defended the death-stricken place. A soft northern atmosphere would have invested it in a certain mystery of romance, but in the clear southern air, the towers and walls standing sharply defined against the blue, wind-swept sky, it looked naked and pitiful, like a poor ghost caught in the daylight.

At some distance from the gate appeared the usual notice as to speed-limit. McKeogh, most scrupulous of drivers, obeyed. As there was a knot of idlers underneath and beyond the gate he slowed down to a crawl, sounding a patient and monotonous horn. We advanced; the peasant folk cleared the way sullenly and suspiciously. Then, deliberately, an elderly man started to cross the road, and on the sound of the horn stood stock-still, with resentful defiance on his weather-beaten face. McKeogh jammed on the brakes. The car halted. But the infinitesimal fraction of a second before it came to a dead stop the wing over the near front wheel touched the elderly person and down he went on the ground. I leaped from the car, to be instantly surrounded by an infuriated crowd, which seemed to gather from all the quarters of the broad, decaying square. The elderly man, helped to his feet by sympathetic hands, shook his knotted fists in my face. He was a dour and ugly peasant, of splendid physique, as hard and discoloured as the walls of Aigues-Mortes; his cunning eyes were as clear as a boy's, his lined, clean-shaven face as rigid as a gargoyle; and the back of his neck, above the low collar of his jersey, showed itself seamed into glazed irregular lozenges, like the hide of a crocodile. He cursed me and my kind healthily in very bad French and apostrophised his friends in Provençal, who in Provençal and bad French made responsive clamour. I had knocked him down on purpose. He was crippled for life. Who was I to go tearing through peaceful towns with my execrable locomotive and massacring innocent people? I tried to explain that the fault was his, and that, after all, to judge by the strength of his lungs, no great damage had been inflicted. But no. They would not let it go like that. There were the gendarmes—I looked across the square and saw two gendarmes striding portentously towards the scene—they would see justice done. The law was there to protect poor folk. For a certainty I would not get off easily.

I knew what would happen. The gendarmes would submit McKeogh and myself to a *procès-verbal*. They would impound the car. I should have to go to the Mairie and make endless depositions. I should have to wait, Heaven knows how long, before I could appear before the *juge de paix*. I should have to find a solicitor to represent me. In the end I should be fined for furious driving—at the rate, when the accident happened, of a mile an hour—and probably have to pay a heavy compensation to the wilful and uninjured victim of McKeogh's impeccable driving. And all the time, while waiting for injustice to take its course, I should be the guest of a hostile population. I grew angry. The crowd grew angrier. The gendarmes approached with an air of majesty and fate. But just before they could be acquainted with the brutal facts of the disaster a singularly bright-eyed man, wearing a hard felt hat and a blue serge suit, flashed like a meteor into the midst of the throng, glanced with an amazing swiftness at me, the car, the crowd, the gendarmes, and the victim, ran his hand up and down the person of the last mentioned, and then, with a frenzied action of a figure in a bad cinematograph rather than that of a human being, subjected the inhabitants to an infuriated philippic in Provençal, of which I could not understand one word. The crowd, with here and there a murmur of remonstrance, listened to him in silence. When he had finished they hung their heads, the gendarmes shrugged their majestic and fateful shoulders and lit cigarettes, and the gargoyle-visaged ancient with the neck of crocodile hide turned grumbling away. I have never witnessed anything so magical as the effect produced by this electric personage. Even McKeogh, who during the previous clamour had sat stiff behind his wheel, keeping expressionless eyes fixed on the cap of the radiator, turned his head two degrees of a circle and glanced at his surroundings.

The instant peace was established our rescuer darted up to me with the directness of a dragon-fly and shook me warmly by the hand. As he had done me a service, I responded with a grateful smile; besides, his aspect was peculiarly prepossessing. I guessed him to be about five-and-thirty. He had a clear olive complexion, black moustache and short silky vandyke beard, and the most fascinating, the most humorous, the most mocking, the most astonishingly bright eyes I have ever seen in my life. I murmured a few expressions of thanks, while he prolonged the handshake with the fervour of a long-lost friend.

"It's all right, my dear sir. Don't worry any more," he said in excellent English, but with a French accent curiously tinged with cockney. "The old gentleman's as sound as a bell—not a bruise on his body." He pushed me gently to the step of the car. "Get in and let me guide you to the only place where you can eat in this accursed town."

Before I could recover from my surprise, he was by my side in the car shouting directions to McKeogh.

"Ah! These people!" he cried, shaking his hands with outspread fingers in front of him. "They have no manners, no decency, no self-respect. It's a regular trade. They go and get knocked down by automobiles on purpose, so that they can claim indemnity. They breed dogs especially and train them to commit suicide under the wheels so that they can get compensation. There's one now—*ah, sacrée bête!*" He leaned over the side of the car and exchanged violent objurgation with the dog. "But, never mind. So long as I am here you can run over anything you like with impunity."

"I'm very much obliged to you," said I. "You've saved me from a deal of foolish unpleasantness. From the way you handled the old gentleman I should guess you to be a doctor."

"That's one of the few things I've never been," he replied. "No; I'm not a doctor. One of these days I'll tell you all about myself." He spoke as if our sudden acquaintance would ripen into lifelong friendship. "There's the hotel—the Hôtel Saint-Louis," he pointed to the sign a little way up the narrow, old-world, cobble-paved street we were entering. "Leave it to me; I'll see that they treat you properly."

The car drew up at the doorway. My electric friend leaped out and met the emerging landlady.

"*Bonjour, madame.* I've brought you one of my very good friends, an English gentleman of the most high importance. He will have *déjeuner—tout ce qu'il y a de mieux*. None of your cabbage-soup and eels and *andouilles*, but a good omelette, some fresh fish, and a bit of very tender meat. Will that suit you?" he asked, turning to me.

"Excellently," said I, smiling. "And since you've ordered me so charming a *déjeuner*, perhaps you'll do me the honour of helping me to eat it?"

"With the very greatest pleasure," said he, without a second's hesitation.

We entered the small, stuffy dining-room, where a dingy waiter, with a dingier smile, showed us to a small table by the window. At the long table in the middle of the room sat the half-dozen frequenters of the house, their napkins tucked under their chins, eating in gloomy silence a dreary meal of the kind my new friend had deprecated.

"What shall we drink?" I asked, regarding with some disfavour the thin red and white wines in the decanters.

"Anything," said he, "but this *piquette du pays*. It tastes like a mixture of sea-water and vinegar. It produces the look of patient suffering that you see on those gentlemen's faces. You, who are not used to it, had better not venture. It would excoriate your throat. It would dislocate your pancreas. It would play the very devil with you. Adolphe"—he beckoned the waiter—"there's a little white wine of the Côtes du Rhone——" he glanced at me.

"I'm in your hands," said I.

As far as eating and drinking went I could not have been in better. Nor could anyone desire a more entertaining chance companion of travel. That he had thrust himself upon me in the most brazen manner and taken complete possession of me there could be no doubt. But it had all been done in the most irresistibly charming manner in the world. One entirely forgot the impudence of the fellow. I have since discovered that he did not lay himself out to be agreeable. The flow of talk and anecdote, the bright laughter that lit up a little joke, making it appear a very brilliant joke indeed, were all spontaneous. He was a man, too, of some cultivation. He knew France thoroughly, England pretty well; he had a discriminating taste in architecture, and waxed poetical over the beauties of nature.

"It strikes me as odd," said I at last, somewhat ironically, "that so vital a person as yourself should find scope for your energies in this dead-and-alive place."

He threw up his hands. "I live here? I crumble and decay in Aigues-Mortes? For whom do you take me?"

I replied that, not having the pleasure of knowing his name and quality, I could only take him for an enigma.

He selected a card from his letter-case and handed it to me across the table. It bore the legend:

Aristide Pujol,
Agent,
213 *bis*, Rue Saint-Honoré, Paris.

"That address will always find me," he said.

Civility bade me give him my card, which he put carefully in his letter-case.

"I owe my success in life," said he, "to the fact that I have never lost an opportunity or a visiting-card."

"Where did you learn your perfect English?" I asked.

"First," said he, "among English tourists at Marseilles. Then in England. I was Professor of French at an academy for young ladies."

"I hope you were a success?" said I.

He regarded me drolly.

"Yes—and no," said he.

The meal over, we left the hotel.

"Now," said he, "you would like to visit the towers on the ramparts. I would dearly love to accompany you, but I have business in the town. I will take you, however, to the *gardien* and put you in his charge."

He raced me to the gate by which I had entered. The *gardien des remparts* issued from his lodge at Aristide Pujol's summons and listened respectfully to his exhortation in Provençal. Then he went for his keys.

"I'll not say good-bye," Aristide Pujol declared amiably. "I'll get through my business long before you've done your sight-seeing, and you'll find me waiting for you near the hotel. *Au revoir*, *cher ami*."

He smiled, lifted his hat, waved his hand in a friendly way, and darted off across the square. The old *gardien* came out with the keys and took me off to the Tour de Constance, where Protestants were imprisoned pell-mell after the revocation of the Edict of Nantes; thence to the Tour des Bourguignons, where I forget how many hundred Burgundians were massacred and pickled in salt; and, after these cheery exhibitions, invited me to walk round the ramparts and inspect the remaining eighteen towers of the enceinte. As the mistral, however, had sprung up, and was shuddering across the high walls, I declined, and, having paid him his fee, descended to the comparative shelter of the earth.

There I found Aristide Pujol awaiting me at the corner of the narrow street in which the hotel was situated. He was wearing—like most of the young bloods of Provence in wintertime—a short, shaggy, yet natty goatskin coat, ornamented with enormous bone buttons, and a little cane valise stood near by on the kerb of the square.

He was not alone. Walking arm in arm with him was a stout, elderly woman of swarthy complexion and forbidding aspect. She was attired in a peasant's or small shopkeeper's rusty Sunday black and an old-fashioned black bonnet prodigiously adorned with black plumes and black roses. Beneath this bonnet her hair was tightly drawn up from her forehead; heavy eyebrows overhung a pair of small, crafty eyes, and a tuft of hair grew on the corner of a prognathous jaw. She might have been about seven-and-forty.

Aristide Pujol, unlinking himself from this unattractive female, advanced and saluted me with considerable deference.

"Monseigneur——" said he.

As I am neither a duke nor an archbishop, but a humble member of the lower automobiling classes, the high-flown title startled me.

"Monseigneur, will you permit me," said he, in French, "to present to you Mme. Gougasse? Madame is the *patronne* of the Café de l'Univers, at Carcassonne, which doubtless you have frequented, and she is going to do me the honour of marrying me to-morrow."

The unexpectedness of the announcement took my breath away.

"Good heavens!" said I, in a whisper.

Anyone less congruous as the bride-elect of the debonair Aristide Pujol it was impossible to imagine. However, it was none of my business. I raised my hat politely to the lady.

"Madame, I offer you my sincere felicitations. As an entertaining husband I am sure you will find M. Aristide Pujol without a rival."

"*Je vous remercie, monseigneur,*" she replied, in what was obviously her best company manner. "And if ever you will deign to come again to the Café de l'Univers at Carcassonne we will esteem it a great honour."

"And so you're going to get married to-morrow?" I remarked, by way of saying something. To congratulate Aristide Pujol on his choice lay beyond my power of hypocrisy.

"To-morrow," said he, "my dear Amélie will make me the happiest of men."

"We start for Carcassonne by the three-thirty train," said Mme. Gougasse, pulling a great silver watch from some fold of her person.

"Then there is time," said I, pointing to a little weather-beaten *café* in the square, "to drink a glass to your happiness."

"*Bien volontiers,*" said the lady.

"*Pardon, chère amie,*" Aristide interposed quickly. "Unless monseigneur and I start at once for Montpellier, I shall not have time to transact my little affairs before your train arrives there."

Parenthetically, I must remark that all trains going from Aigues-Mortes to Carcassonne must stop at Montpellier.

"That's true," she agreed, in a hesitating manner. "But——"

"But, idol of my heart, although I am overcome with grief at the idea of leaving you for two little hours, it is a question of four thousand francs. Four thousand francs are not picked up every day in the street. It's a lot of money."

Mme. Gougasse's little eyes glittered.

"*Bien sûr*. And it's quite settled?"

"Absolutely."

"And it will be all for me?"

"Half," said Aristide.

"You promised all to me for the redecoration of the ceiling of the *café*."

"Three thousand will be sufficient, dear angel. What? I know these contractors and decorators. The more you pay them, the more abominable will they make the ceiling. Leave it to me. I, Aristide, will guarantee you a ceiling like that of the Sistine Chapel for two thousand francs."

She smiled and bridled, so as to appear perfectly well-bred in my presence. The act of smiling caused the tuft of hair on her jaw to twitch horribly. A cold shiver ran down my back.

"Don't you think, monseigneur," she asked archly, "that M. Pujol should give me the four thousand francs as a wedding present?"

"Most certainly," said I, in my heartiest voice, entirely mystified by the conversation.

"Well, I yield," said Aristide. "Ah, women, women! They hold up their little rosy finger, and the bravest of men has to lie down with his chin on his paws like a good old watch-dog. You agree, then, monseigneur, to my giving the whole of the four thousand francs to Amélie?"

"More than that," said I, convinced that the swarthy lady of the prognathous jaw was bound to have her own way in the end where money was concerned, and yet for the life of me not seeing how I had anything to do with the disposal of Aristide Pujol's property—"More than that," said I; "I command you to do it."

"*C'est bien gentil de votre part*," said madame.

"And now the *café*," I suggested, with chattering teeth. We had been standing all the time at the corner of the square, while the mistral whistled down the narrow street. The dust was driven stingingly into our faces, and the women of the place who passed us by held their black scarves over their mouths.

"Alas, monseigneur," said Mme. Gougasse, "Aristide is right. You must start now for Montpellier in the automobile. I will go by the train for Carcassonne at three-thirty. It is the only train from Aigues-Mortes. Aristide transacts his business and joins me in the train at Montpellier. You have not much time to spare."

I was bewildered. I turned to Aristide Pujol, who stood, hands on hips, regarding his prospective bride and myself with humorous benevolence.

"My good friend," said I, in English, "I've not the remotest idea of what the two of you are talking about, but I gather you have arranged that I should motor you to Montpellier. Now, I'm not going to Montpellier. I've just come from there, as I told you at *déjeuner*. I'm going in the opposite direction."

He took me familiarly by the arm, and, with a *"Pardon, chère amie,"* to the lady, led me a few paces aside.

"I beseech you," he whispered; "it's a matter of four thousand francs, a hundred and sixty pounds, eight hundred dollars, a new ceiling for the Café de l'Univers, the dream of a woman's life, and the happiest omen for my wedded felicity. The fair goddess Hymen invites you with uplifted torch. You can't refuse."

He hypnotised me with his bright eyes, overpowered my will by his winning personality. He seemed to force me to desire his companionship. I weakened. After all, I reflected, I was at a loose end, and where I went did not matter to anybody. Aristide Pujol had also done me a considerable service, for which I felt grateful. I yielded with good grace.

He darted back to Mme. Gougasse, alive with gaiety.

"Chère amie, if you were to press monseigneur, I'm sure he would come to Carcassonne and dance at our wedding."

"Alas! That," said I, hastily, "is out of the question. But," I added, amused by a humorous idea, "why should two lovers separate even for a few hours? Why should not madame accompany us to Montpellier? There is room in my auto for three, and it would give me the opportunity of making madame's better acquaintance."

"There, Amélie!" cried Aristide. "What do you say?"

"Truly, it is too much honour," murmured Mme. Gougasse, evidently tempted.

"There's your luggage, however," said Aristide. "You would bring that great trunk, for which there is no place in the automobile of monseigneur."

"That's true—my luggage."

"Send it on by train, *chère amie.*"

"When will it arrive at Carcassonne?"

"Not to-morrow," said Pujol, "but perhaps next week or the week after. Perhaps it may never come at all. One is never certain with these railway companies. But what does that matter?"

"What do you say?" cried the lady sharply.

"It may arrive or it may not arrive; but you are rich enough, *chère amie,* not to think of a few camisoles and bits of jewellery."

"And my lace and my silk dress that I have brought to show your parents. *Merci!*" she retorted, with a dangerous spark in her little eyes. "You think one is made of money, eh? You will soon find yourself mistaken, my friend. I would give you to understand——" she checked herself suddenly. "Monseigneur," she turned to me with a resumption of the gracious manner of her bottle-decked counter at the Café de l'Univers, "you are too amiable. I appreciate your offer infinitely; but I am not going to entrust my luggage to the kind care of the railway company. *Merci, non.* They are robbers and thieves. Even if it did arrive, half the things would be stolen. Oh, I know them."

She shook the head of an experienced and self-reliant woman. No doubt, distrustful of banks as of railway companies, she kept her money hidden in her bedroom. I pitied my poor young friend; he would need all his gaiety to enliven the domestic side of the Café de l'Univers.

The lady having declined my invitation, I expressed my regrets; and Aristide, more emotional, voiced his sense of heart-rent desolation, and in a resigned tone informed me that it was time to start. I left the lovers and went to the hotel, where I paid the bill, summoned McKeogh, and lit a companionable pipe.

The car backed down the narrow street into the square and took up its position. We entered, McKeogh took charge of Aristide's valise, tucked us up in the rug, and settled him in his seat. The car started and we drove off, Aristide gallantly brandishing his hat and Mme. Gougasse waving her lily hand, which happened to be hidden in an ill-fitting black glove.

"To Montpellier, as fast as you can!" he shouted at the top of his lungs to McKeogh. Then he sighed as he threw himself luxuriously back. "Ah, this is better than a train. Amélie doesn't know that a mistake she has made!"

The elderly victim of my furious entry was lounging, in spite of the mistral, by the grim machicolated gateway. Instead of scowling at me he raised his hat respectfully as we passed. I touched my cap, but Aristide returned the salute with the grave politeness of royalty.

"This is a place," said he, "which I would like never to behold again."

In a few moments we were whirling along the straight, white road between the interminable black vineyards, and past the dilapidated homesteads of the vine-folk and wayside *cafés* that are scattered about this unjoyous corner of France.

"Well," said he suddenly, "what do you think of my *fiancée?*"

Politeness and good taste forbade expression of my real opinion. I murmured platitudes to the effect that she seemed to be a most sensible woman, with a head for business.

"She's not what we in French call *jolie, jolie:* but what of that? What's the good of marrying a pretty face for other men to make love to? And, as you English say, there's none of your confounded sentiment about her. But she has the most flourishing *café* in Carcassonne; and, when the ceiling is newly decorated, provided she doesn't insist on too much gold leaf and too many naked babies on clouds—it's astonishing how women love naked babies on clouds—it will be the snuggest place in the world. May I ask for one of your excellent cigarettes?"

I handed him the case from the pocket of the car.

"It was there that I made her acquaintance," he resumed, after having lit the cigarette from my pipe. "We met, we talked, we fixed it up. She is not the woman to go by four roads to a thing. She did me the honour of going straight for me. Ah! but what a wonderful woman! She rules that *café* like a kingdom; a Semiramis, a Queen Elizabeth, a Catherine de' Medici. She sits enthroned behind the counter all day long and takes the money and counts the saucers and smiles on rich clients, and if a waiter in a far corner gives a bit of sugar to a dog she spots it, and the waiter has a deuce of a time. That woman is worth her weight in thousand-franc notes. She goes to bed every night at one, and gets up in the morning at five. And virtuous! Didn't Solomon say that a virtuous woman was more precious than rubies? That's the kind of wife the wise man chooses when he gives up the giddy ways of youth. Ah, my dear sir, over and over again these last two or three days my dear old parents—I have been on a visit to them in Aigues-Mortes—have commended my wisdom. Amélie, who is devoted to me, left her *café* in Carcassonne to make their acquaintance and receive their blessing before our marriage, also to show them the lace on her *dessous* and her new silk dress. They are too old to take the long journey to Carcassonne. 'My son,' they said, 'you are making a marriage after our own hearts. We are proud of you. Now we can die perfectly content.' I was wrong, perhaps, in saying that Amélie has not sentiment," he continued, after a short pause. "She adores me. It is evident. She will not allow me out of her sight. Ah, my dear friend, you don't know what a happy man I am."

For a brilliant young man of five-and-thirty, who was about to marry a horrible Megæra ten or twelve years his senior, he looked unhealthily happy. There was no doubt that his handsome roguery had caught the woman's fancy. She was at the dangerous age, when even the most ferro-concrete-natured of women are apt to run riot. She was comprehensible, and pardonable. But the man baffled me. He was obviously marrying her for her money; but how in the name of Diogenes and all the cynics could he manage to look so confoundedly joyful about it?

The mistral blew bitterly. I snuggled beneath the rug and hunched up my shoulders so as to get my ears protected by my coat-collar. Aristide, sufficiently protected by his goat's hide, talked like a shepherd on a May morning. Why he took for granted my interest in his unromantic, not to say sordid, courtship I knew not; but he gave me the whole history of it from its modest beginnings to its now penultimate stage. From what I could make out—for the mistral whirled many of his words away over unheeding Provence—he had entered the Café de l'Univers one evening, a human derelict battered by buffeting waves of Fortune, and, finding a seat immediately beneath Mme. Gougasse's *comptoir*, had straightway poured his grievances into a feminine ear and, figuratively speaking, rested his weary heart upon a feminine bosom. And his buffetings and grievances and wearinesses? Whence came they? I asked the question point-blank.

"Ah, my dear friend," he answered, kissing his gloved finger-tips, "she was adorable!"

"Who?" I asked, taken aback. "Mme. Gougasse?"

"*Mon Dieu*, no!" he replied. "Not Mme. Gougasse. Amélie is solid, she is virtuous, she is jealous, she is capacious; but I should not call her adorable. No; the adorable one was twenty—delicious and English; a peach-blossom, a zephyr, a summer night's dream, and the most provoking little witch you ever saw in your life. Her father and herself and six of her compatriots were touring through France. They had circular tickets. So had I. In fact, I was a miniature Thomas Cook and Son to the party. I provided them with the discomforts of travel and supplied erroneous information. *Que voulez-vous?* If people ask you for the history of a pair of Louis XV corsets, in a museum glass case, it's much better to stimulate their imagination by saying that they were worn by Joan of Arc at the Battle of Agincourt than to dull their minds by your ignorance. *Eh bien*, we go through the *châteaux* of the Loire, through Poitiers and Angoulême, and we come to Carcassonne. You know Carcassonne? The great grim *cité*, with its battlements and bastions and barbicans and fifty towers on the hill looking over the rubbishy modern town? We were there. The rest of the party were buying picture postcards of the *gardien* at the foot of the Tour de l'Inquisition. The man who invented picture postcards ought to have his statue on the top of the Eiffel Tower. The millions of headaches he has saved! People go to places now not to exhaust themselves by seeing them, but to buy picture postcards of them. The rest of the party, as I said, were deep in picture postcards. Mademoiselle and I promenaded outside. We often promenaded outside when the others were buying picture postcards," he remarked, with an extra twinkle in his bright eyes. "And the result? Was it my fault? We leaned over the parapet. The wind blew a confounded *mèche*—what do you call it——?"

"Strand?"

"Yes—strand of her hair across her face. She let it blow and laughed and did not move. Didn't I say she was a little witch? If there's a Provençal ever born who would not have kissed a girl under such provocation I should like to have his mummy. I kissed her. She kept on laughing. I kissed her again. I kissed her four times. At the beginning of the fourth kiss out came her father from the postcard shop. He waited till the end of it and then announced himself. He announced himself in such ungentlemanly terms that I was forced to let the whole party, including the adorable little witch, go on to Pau by themselves, while I betook my broken heart to the Café de l'Univers."

"And there you found consolation?"

"I told my sad tale. Amélie listened and called the manager to take charge of the *comptoir*, and poured herself out a glass of Frontignan. Amélie always drinks Frontignan when her heart is touched. I came the next day and the next. It was pouring with rain day and night—and Carcassonne in rain is like Hades with its furnaces put out by human tears—and the Café de l'Univers like a little warm corner of Paradise stuck in the midst of it."

"And so that's how it happened?"

"That's how it happened. *Ma foi!* When a lady asks a *galant homme* to marry her, what is he to do? Besides, did I not say that the Café de l'Univers was the most prosperous in Carcassonne? I'm afraid you English, my dear friend, have such sentimental ideas about marriage. Now, we in France— *Attendez, attendez!*" He suddenly broke off his story, lurched forward, and gripped the front seat.

"To the right, man, to the right!" he cried excitedly to McKeogh.

We had reached the point where the straight road from Aigues-Mortes branches into a fork, one road going to Montpellier, the other to Nîmes. Montpellier being to the west, McKeogh had naturally taken the left fork.

"To the right!" shouted Aristide.

McKeogh pulled up and turned his head with a look of protesting inquiry. I intervened with a laugh.

"You're wrong in your geography, M. Pujol. Besides, there is the signpost staring you in the face. This is the way to Montpellier."

"But, my dear, Heaven-sent friend. I no more want to go to Montpellier than you do!" he cried. "Montpellier is the last place on earth I desire to visit. You want to go to Nîmes, and so do I. To the right, chauffeur."

"What shall I do, sir?" asked McKeogh.

I was utterly bewildered. I turned to the goatskin-clad, pointed-bearded, bright-eyed Aristide, who, sitting bolt upright in the car, with his hands stretched out, looked like a parody of the god Pan in a hard felt hat.

"You don't want to go to Montpellier?" I asked stupidly.

"No—ten thousand times no; not for a king's ransom."

"But your four thousand francs—your meeting Mme. Gougasse's train—your getting on to Carcassonne?"

"If I could put twenty million continents between myself and Carcassonne I'd do it," he explained, with frantic gestures. "Don't you understand? The good Lord who is always on my side sent you specially to deliver me out of the hands of that unspeakable Xantippe. There are no four thousand francs. I'm not going to meet her train at Montpellier, and if she marries anyone to-morrow at Carcassonne it will not be Aristide Pujol."

I shrugged my shoulders.

"We'll go to Nîmes."

"Very good, sir," said McKeogh.

"And now," said I, as soon as we had started on the right-hand road, "will you have the kindness to explain?"

"There's nothing to explain," he cried gleefully. "Here am I delivered. I am free. I can breathe God's good air again. I'm not going to marry Yum-Yum, Yum-Yum. I feel ten years younger. Oh, I've had a narrow escape. But that's the way with me. I always fall on my feet. Didn't I tell you I've never lost an opportunity? The moment I saw an Englishman in difficulties, I realised my opportunity of being delivered out of the House of Bondage. I took it, and here I am! For two days I had been racking my brains for a means of getting out of Aigues-Mortes, when suddenly you—a *deus ex machina*—a veritable god out of the machine—come to my aid. Don't say there isn't a Providence watching over me."

I suggested that his mode of escape seemed somewhat elaborate and fantastic. Why couldn't he have slipped quietly round to the railway station and taken a ticket to any haven of refuge he might have fancied?

"For the simple reason," said he, with a gay laugh, "that I haven't a single penny piece in the world."

He looked so prosperous and untroubled that I stared incredulously.

"Not one tiny bronze sou," said he.

"You seem to take it pretty philosophically," said I.

"*Les gueux, les gueux, sont des gens heureux*," he quoted.

"You're the first person who has made me believe in the happiness of beggars."

"In time I shall make you believe in lots of things," he retorted. "No, I hadn't one sou to buy a ticket, and Amélie never left me. I spent my last franc on the journey from Carcassonne to Aigues-Mortes.

Amélie insisted on accompanying me. She was taking no chances. Her eyes never left me from the time we started. When I ran to your assistance she was watching me from a house on the other side of the *place*. She came to the hotel while we were lunching. I thought I would slip away unnoticed and join you after you had made the *tour des remparts*. But no. I must present her to my English friend. And then—*voyons*—didn't I tell you I never lost a visiting-card? Look at this?"

He dived into his pocket, produced the letter-case, and extracted a card.

"*Voilà.*"

I read: "The Duke of Wiltshire."

"But, good heavens, man," I cried, "that's not the card I gave you."

"I know it isn't," said he; "but it's the one I showed to Amélie."

"How on earth," I asked, "did you come by the Duke of Wiltshire's visiting-card?"

He looked at me roguishly.

"I am—what do you call it?—a—a 'snapper up of unconsidered trifles.' You see I know my Shakespeare. I read *The Winter's Tale* with some French pupils to whom I was teaching English. I love Autolycus. *C'est un peu moi, hein?* Anyhow, I showed the Duke's card to Amélie."

I began to understand. "That was why you called me 'monseigneur'?"

"Naturally. And I told her that you were my English patron, and would give me four thousand francs as a wedding-present if I accompanied you to your agent's at Montpellier, where you could draw the money. Ah! But she was suspicious! Yesterday I borrowed a bicycle. A friend left it in the courtyard. I thought, 'I will creep out at dead of night, when everyone's asleep, and once on my *petite bicyclette*, *bonsoir la compagnie*.' But, would you believe it? When I had dressed and crept down, and tried to mount the bicycle, I found both tyres had been punctured in a hundred places with the point of a pair of scissors. What do you think of that, eh? Ah, *là, là!* it has been a narrow escape. When you invited her to accompany us to Montpellier my heart was in my mouth."

"It would have served you right," I said, "if she had accepted."

He laughed as though, instead of not having a penny, he had not a care in the world. Accustomed to the geometrical conduct of my well-fed fellow-Britons, who map out their lives by rule and line, I had no measure whereby to gauge this amazing and inconsequential person. In one way he had acted abominably. To leave an affianced bride in the lurch in this heartless manner was a most ungentlemanly proceeding. On the other hand, an unscrupulous adventurer would have married the woman for her money and chanced the consequences. In the tussle between Perseus and the Gorgon the odds are all in favour of Perseus. Mercury and Minerva, the most sharp-witted of the gods, are helping him all the time—to say nothing of the fact that Perseus starts out by being a notoriously handsome fellow. So a handsome rogue can generally wheedle an elderly, ugly wife into opening her money-bags, and, if successful, leads the enviable life of a fighting-cock. It was very much to his credit that this kind of life was not to the liking of Aristide Pujol.

Indeed, speaking from affectionate knowledge of the man, I can declare that the position in which he, like many a better man, had placed himself was intolerable. Other men of equal sensitiveness would have extricated themselves in a more commonplace fashion; but the dramatic appealed to my rascal, and he has often plumed himself on his calculated *coup de théâtre* at the fork of the roads. He was delighted with it. Even now I sometimes think that Aristide Pujol will never grow up.

"There's one thing I don't understand," said I, "and that is your astonishing influence over the populace at Aigues-Mortes. You came upon them like a firework—a devil-among-the-tailors—and everybody, gendarmes and victim included, became as tame as sheep. How was it?"

He laughed. "I said you were my very old and dear friend and patron, a great English duke."

"I don't quite see how that explanation satisfied the pig-headed old gentleman whom I knocked down."

"Oh, that," said Aristide Pujol, with a look of indescribable drollery, "that was my old father."

H. SETON MERRIMAN

(1863–1903)

HENRY SETON MERRIMAN (the pseudonym of Hugh Stowell Scott) was the author of many stirring stories of love and adventure, the scene of which was usually laid in one European country or another. His books attracted attention from the first, and he was greatly admired by a very considerable public. Among his best novels are *With Edged Tools* (1894), *The Sowers* (1896), *The Velvet Glove* (1901), *The Vultures* (1902), and *Barlasch of the Guard* (1903).

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SISTER

IT does not matter where it was. I do not want other people—that is to say, those who were around us—to recognise Sister or myself. It is not likely that she will see this, and I am not sure that she knows my name. Of course, someone may draw her attention to this paper, and she may remember that the name affixed to it is that which I signed at the foot of a document we made out together—namely, a return of deaths. At the foot of this paper our names stood one beneath the other—stand there still, perhaps, in some forgotten bundle of papers at the War Office.

I only hope that she will not see this, for she might consider it a breach of professional etiquette; and I attach great importance to the opinion of this woman, whom I have only seen once in my whole life. Moreover, on that occasion, she was subordinate to me—more or less in the position of a servant.

Suffice it to say, therefore, that it was war-time, and our trade was what the commercial papers call brisk. A war better remembered of the young than of the old, because it was, comparatively speaking, recent. The old fellows seem to remember the old fights better—those fights that were fought when their blood was still young and the vessels thereof unclogged.

It was, by the way, my first campaign, but I was not new to the business of blood; for I am no soldier—only a doctor. My only uniform—my full-parade dress—is a red cross on the arm of an old blue serge jacket—such jacket being much stained with certain dull patches which are better not investigated.

All who have taken part in war—doing the damage or repairing it—know that things are not done in quite the same way when ball-cartridge is served out instead of blank. The correspondents are very fond of reporting that the behaviour of the men suggested a parade—which simile, it is to be presumed, was borne in upon their fantastic brains by its utter inapplicability. The parade may be suggested before the real work begins—when it is a question of marching away from the landing-stage; but after the work—*our* work—has begun, there is remarkably little resemblance to a review.

We are served with many official papers which we never fill in, because, on the spur of the moment, it is apt to suggest itself that men's lives are more important. We misapply a vast majority of our surgical supplies, because the most important item is usually left behind at headquarters or at the seaport depot. In fact, we do many things that we should leave undone, and omit to do more which we are expected (officially) to do.

For some reason—presumably the absence of better men—I was sent up to the front before we had been three days at work. Our hospital by the river was not full when I received orders to follow the flying column with two assistants and the appliances of a field-hospital.

Out of this little nucleus sprang the largest depot for sick and wounded that was formed during the campaign. We were within easy reach of headquarters, and I was fortunately allowed a free hand. Thus our establishment in the desert grew daily more important, and finally superseded the hospital at headquarters.

We had a busy time, for the main column had now closed up with the first expeditionary force, and our troops were in touch with the enemy not forty miles away from me.

In the course of time—when the authorities learnt to cease despising the foe, which is a little failing in British military high places—it was deemed expedient to fortify us, and then, in addition to two medical assistants, I was allowed three Government nurses. This last piece of news was not hailed with so much enthusiasm as might have been expected. I am not in favour of bringing women anywhere near the front. They are, for their own sakes and for the peace of mind of others, much better left behind. If they are beyond a certain age they break down and have to be sent back at considerable trouble—that is to say, an escort and an ambulance cart, of which latter there are never enough. If they are below the climacteric—ever so little below it—they cause mischief of another description, and the wounded are neglected; for there is no passion of the human heart so cruel and selfish as love.

"I am sorry to hear it," I said to light-hearted little Sammy Fitz-Warrener of the Naval Brigade, who brought me the news.

"Sorry to hear it? Gad! I shouldn't be. The place has got a different look about it when there are women-folk around. They are so jolly clever in their ways—worth ten of your red-cross ruffians."

"That is as may be," I answered, breaking open the case of whisky which Sammy had brought up on the carriage of his machine-gun for my private consumption.

He was taking this machine-gun up to the front, and mighty proud he was of it.

"A clever gun," he called it; "an almighty clever gun."

He had ridden alongside of it—sitting on the top of his horse as sailors do—through seventy miles of desert without a halt; watching over it and tending it as he might have watched and tended his mother, or perhaps some other woman.

"Gad! doctor," he exclaimed, kicking out his sturdy legs, and contemplating with some satisfaction the yellow hide top-boots which he had bought at the Army and Navy Stores. (I know the boots well, and—avoid them.) "Gad! doctor, you should see that gun on the war-path. Travels as light as a tricycle. And when she begins to talk—my stars! Click—click—click—click! For all the world like a steam-launch's engine—mowing 'em down all the time. No work for you there. It will be no use you and your satellites progging about with skewers for the bullet. Look at the other side, my boy, and you'll find the beauty has just walked through them."

"Soda or plain?" I asked, in parenthesis.

"Soda. I don't like the flavour of dead camel. A big drink, please. I feel as if I were lined with sand-paper."

He slept that night in the little shanty built of mud and roofed chiefly with old palm-mats, which was gracefully called the head surgeon's quarters. That is to say, he partook of such hospitality as I had to offer him.

Sammy and I had met before he had touched a rope or I a scalpel. We hailed from the same part of the country—down Devonshire way; and, to a limited extent, we knew each other's people—which little phrase has a vast meaning in places where men do congregate.

We turned in pretty early—I on a hospital mattress, he in my bed; but Sam would not go to sleep. He would lie with his arms above his head (which is not an attitude of sleep) and talk about that everlasting gun.

I dozed off to the murmur of his voice expatiating on the extreme cunning of the ejector, and awoke to hear details of the rifling.

We did not talk of home, as do men in books when lying by a campfire. Perhaps it was owing to the absence of that picturesque adjunct to a soldier's life. We talked chiefly of the clever gun; and once, just before he fell asleep, Sammy returned to the question of the nurses.

"Yes," he said, "the head saw-bones down there told me to tell you that he had got permission to send you three nurses. Treat 'em kindly, Jack, for my sake. Bless their hearts! They mean well."

Then he fell asleep, and left me thinking of his words, and of the spirit which had prompted them.

I knew really nothing of this man's life, but he seemed singularly happy, with that happiness which only comes when daily existence has a background to it. He spoke habitually of women, as if he loved them all for the sake of one; and this not being precisely my own position, I was glad when he fell asleep.

The fort was astir next morning at four. The bugler kindly blew a blast into our glassless window which left no doubt about it.

"That means all hands on deck, I take it," said Sam, who was one of the few men capable of good humour before tiffin time.

By six o'clock he was ready to go. It was easy to see what sort of officer this cheery sailor was by the way his men worked.

While they were getting the machine-gun limbered up, Sam came back to my quarters, and took a hasty breakfast.

"Feel a bit down this morning," he said, with a gay smile. "Cheap—very cheap. I hope I am not going to funk it. It is all very well for some of you long-faced fellows, who don't seem to have much to live for, to fight for the love of fighting. I don't want to fight any man; I am too fond of 'em all for that."

I went out after breakfast, and I gave him a leg up on to his very sorry horse, which he sat like a tailor or a sailor. He held the reins like tiller-lines, and indulged in a pleased smile at the effect of the yellow boots.

"No great hand at this sort of thing," he said, with a nod of farewell. "When the beast does anything out of the common, or begins to make heavy weather of it, *I am not*."

He ranged up alongside his beloved gun, and gave the word of command with more dignity than he knew what to do with.

All that day I was employed in arranging quarters for the nurses. To do this I was forced to turn some of our most precious stores out into the open, covering them with a tarpaulin, and in consequence felt all the more assured that my chief was making a great mistake.

At nine o'clock in the evening they arrived, one of the juniors having ridden out in the moonlight to meet them. He reported them completely exhausted; informed me that he had recommended them to go straight to bed; and was altogether more enthusiastic about the matter than I personally or officially cared to see.

He handed me a pencil note from my chief at headquarters, explaining that he had not written me a dispatch because he had nothing but a "J" pen, with which instrument he could not make himself legible. It struck me that he was suffering from a plethora of assistance, and was anxious to reduce his staff.

I sent my enthusiastic assistant to the nurses' quarters, with a message that they were not to report themselves to me until they had had a night's rest. Then I turned in.

At midnight I was awakened by the orderly, and summoned to the tent of the officer in command. This youth's face was considerably whiter than his linen. He was consulting with his second in command, a boy of twenty-two or thereabouts.

A man covered with sand and blood was sitting in a hammock-chair, rubbing his eyes, and drinking something out of a tumbler.

"News from the front?" I inquired, without ceremony, which hindrance we had long since dispensed with.

"Yes, and bad news."

It certainly was not pleasant hearing. Someone mentioned the word "disaster," and we looked at each other with hard, anxious eyes. I thought of the women, and almost decided to send them back before daylight.

In a few moments a fresh man was roused out of his bed, and sent full gallop through the moonlight across the desert to headquarters, and the officer in command began to regain confidence. I think he extracted it from the dispatch-bearer's tumbler. After all, he was not responsible for much. He was merely a connecting-link, a point of touch between two greater men.

It was necessary to get my men to work at once, but I gave particular orders to leave the nurses undisturbed. Disaster at the front meant hard work at the rear. We all knew that, and endeavoured to make ready for a sudden rush of wounded.

The rush began before daylight. As they came in we saw to them, dressing their wounds and packing them as closely as possible. But the stream was continuous. They never stopped coming; they never gave us a moment's rest.

At six o'clock I gave orders to awaken the nurses and order them to prepare their quarters for the reception of the wounded. At half-past six an Army Hospital Corps man came to me in the ward.

"Shockin' case, sir, just come in," he said. "Officer. Gun busted, sir."

"Take him to my quarters," I said, wiping my instruments on my sleeve.

In a few minutes I followed, and on entering my little room the first thing I saw was a pair of yellow boots.

There was no doubt about the boots and the white duck trousers, and although I could not see the face, I knew that this was Sammy Fitz-Warrener come back again.

A woman—one of the nurses for whom he had pleaded—was bending over the bed with a sponge and a basin of tepid water. As I entered she turned upon me a pair of calmly horror-stricken eyes.

"Oh!" she whispered meaningly, stepping back to let me approach. I had no time to notice then that she was one of those largely built women, with perfect skin and fair hair, who make one think of what England must have been before Gallic blood got to be so widely disseminated in the race.

"Please pull down that mat from the window," I said, indicating a temporary blind which I had put up.

She did so promptly, and returned to the bedside, falling into position as it were, awaiting my orders.

I bent over the bed, and I must confess that what I saw there gave me a thrill of horror which will come again at times so long as I live.

I made a sign to Sister to continue her task of sponging away the mud, of which one ingredient was sand.

"Both eyes," she whispered, "are destroyed."

"Not the top of the skull," I said; "you must not touch that."

For we both knew that our task was without hope.

As I have said, I knew something of Fitz-Warrener's people, and I could not help lingering there, where I could do no good, when I knew that I was wanted elsewhere.

Suddenly his lips moved, and Sister, kneeling down on the floor, bent over him.

I could not hear what he said, but I think she did. I saw her lips frame the whisper "Yes" in reply, and over her face there swept suddenly a look of great tenderness.

After a little pause she rose and came to me.

"Who is he?" she asked.

"Fitz-Warrener of the Naval Brigade. Do you know him?"

"No, I never heard of him. Of course—it is quite hopeless."

"Quite."

She returned to her position by the bedside, with one arm laid across his chest.

Presently he began whispering again, and at intervals she answered him. It suddenly occurred to me that, in his unconsciousness, he was mistaking her for someone else, and that she, for some woman's reason, was deceiving him purposely.

In a few moments I was sure of this.

I tried not to look; but I saw it all. I saw his poor blind hands wander over her throat and face, up to her hair.

"What is this?" he muttered quite distinctly, with that tone of self-absorption which characterises the sayings of an unconscious man. "What is this silly cap?"

His fingers wandered on over the snowy linen until they came to the strings.

As an aspirant to the title of gentleman, I felt like running away—many doctors know this feeling; as a doctor, I could only stay.

His fingers fumbled with the strings. Still Sister bent over the bed. Perhaps she bent an inch or two nearer. One hand was beneath his neck, supporting the poor shattered head.

He slowly drew off the cap, and his fingers crept lovingly over the soft fair hair.

"Marny," he said, quite clearly, "you've done your hair up, and you're nothing but a little girl, you know—nothing but a little girl."

I could not help watching his fingers, and yet I felt like a man committing sacrilege.

"When I left you," said the brainless voice, "you wore it down your back. You were a little girl—you are a little girl now." And he slowly drew a hairpin out.

One long lock fell curling to her shoulder. She never looked up, never noticed me, but knelt there like a ministering angel—personating for a time a girl whom we had never seen.

"My little girl," he added, with a low laugh, and drew out another hairpin.

In a few moments all her hair was about her shoulders. I had never thought that she might be carrying such glory quietly hidden beneath the simple nurse's cap.

"That is better," he said—"that is better." And he let all the hairpins fall on the coverlet. "Now you are my own Marny," he murmured. "Are you not?"

She hesitated one moment. "Yes, dear," she said softly. "I am your own Marny."

With her disengaged hand she stroked his blanching cheek. There was a certain science about her touch, as if she had once known something of these matters.

Lovingly and slowly the smoke-grimed fingers passed over the wonderful hair, smoothing it.

Then he grew more daring. He touched her eyes, her gentle cheeks, the quiet, strong lips. He slipped to her shoulder, and over the soft folds of her black dress.

"Been gardening?" he asked, coming to the bib of her nursing apron.

It was marvellous how the brain, which was laid open to the day, retained the consciousness of one subject so long.

"Yes—dear," she whispered.

"Your old apron is all wet!" he said reproachfully, touching her breast where the blood—his own blood—was slowly drying.

His hand passed on, and as it touched her, I saw her eyes soften into such a wonderful tenderness that I felt as if I were looking on a part of Sister's life which was sacred.

I saw a little movement as if to draw back, then she resolutely held her position. But her eyes were dull with a new pain. I wonder—I have wondered ever since—what memories that poor senseless wreck of a man was arousing in the woman's heart by his wandering touch.

"Marny," he said, "Marny. It was not *too* hard waiting for me."

"No, dear."

"It will be all right now, Marny. The bad part is all past."

"Yes."

"Marny, you remember—the night—I left—Marny—I want—no—no, your *lips*."

I knelt suddenly, and slipped my hand within his shirt, for I saw something in his face.

As Sister's lips touched his I felt his heart give a great bound within his breast, and then it was still.

When she lifted her face it was as pale as his.

I must say that I felt like crying—a feeling which had not come to me for twenty years. I busied myself purposely with the dead man, and when I had finished my task I turned, and found Sister filling in the papers—her cap neatly tied, her golden hair hidden.

I signed the certificate, placing my name beneath hers.

For a moment we stood. Our eyes met, and—we said nothing. She moved towards the door, and I held it open while she passed out.

Two hours later I received orders from the officer in command to send the nurses back to headquarters. Our men were falling back before the enemy.

W. PETT RIDGE

WILLIAM PETT RIDGE led a country life until 1890, when he came to London and established himself as a writer. He has described his hobby as "roaming east of Aldgate and south," and on these excursions he kept his eyes open, and used what he saw as the basis of his novels, which are usually descriptive of lower middle-class life in London and the suburbs. He first became popular with *Mord Em'ly* (1898); and among his many other books are *Erb* (1903), *Mrs. Gale's Business* (1905), *Splendid Brother* (1909), and *Miss Mannering* (1923).

"Oh, Liberty!" is reprinted by permission of the author.

OH, LIBERTY!

THE narrow-faced man came out, clean-shaven, from the hairdresser's in Hoxton Street, and looked up and down the street inquiringly, as though not quite certain what he should do next. A heated boy ran by, tripping over the newspaper placard which he held; one of the items inscribed on this was, "The Escaped Prisoner." The narrow-faced man called to the boy and took a paper as though intending to purchase it; glanced at the three-thirty winner, and muttering an ejaculation of regret, gave back the journal to the indignant boy and strolled off, still grumbling to himself. In Old Street he stopped and looked at goods outside a shop, but the attendant was watching from behind an ambush of linoleum rolls, and the man moved on again.

"Precious little chance," he complained to himself, "of picking up a living in this blessed world. Why, I should be better off in goodness knows where!" Another lad went by, carrying the same poster.

The clean-shaven man ceased talking, and almost hurried towards a public-house near to Nile Street. There he found two men lounging in the manner of indolent sentries, and to them he spoke hoarsely, with a frightened, hunted air.

"'Appen to know a party of the name of Blenkinsop?"

The two loafers took their pipes from their mouths and consulted each other with a look before replying.

"Can't say as we do," answered one.

"I don't know what to be up to," said the man, distractedly. "I'm at me wit's end. I've got a message for a party of the name of Blenkinsop from someone in"—he glanced round nervously—"from someone in quod."

"You just out?" asked one of the loungers, with eager interest.

"Can I trust you?"

"Try us and see."

"I want your word," he said.

"We give it you," agreed the two reluctantly.

"Fetch a newspaper," he ordered. They found an *Evening News*. "Anything there about an escaped pris'ner?" he asked in a confidential whisper, after looking up and down the street. One of the men found the reference, and recited it carefully. "The authorities have virtually given up all hopes of recovering the escaped man. The theory is that he has made his way to the coast and joined some foreign vessel."

"Jined some foreign vessel," echoed the man. He rolled his head and smiled mysteriously. "I've always said that a detective can do everything but detect."

"What's this got to do with you?"

He took the newspaper, placed his thumb over the paragraph which had been read, and whispered.

"You?"

"For 'Eaven's sake," he went on agitatedly, "don't give me away. If you've got 'earts that can be called 'earts, let 'em beat a bit on my be'alf. I tell you I've had the roughest time this last three weeks that ever mortal man endured. Sleeping out under 'edges at night, living on turnips and what not, scuttling off like mad at the sound of the living voice, avoiding anything like a good-sized village, 'elping myself at 'ere and there a wayside 'ouse when opportunity offered——"

"We know what you mean," said the interested listeners.

"Gradu'lly," he went on, with a slow dramatic movement of the arm, "gradu'lly a-workin' me way up to London hinch by hinch, and when I gets there, afraid—I may as well be perfec'ly frank with you—absolutely afraid to go to me own wife and me own quarters, for fear I should be swooped down on and carried off like—like a eagle with its prey."

"You was vurry wise," agreed the two men. "Come in and 'ave something."

"I've always said," he remarked tearfully, as he followed them through the swing-doors, "and I'll maintain it through thick and thin, no matter who calls me a liar, that kind words——"

"What's it to be?"

"Can never die," he concluded gratefully. "I'll 'ave the same as what you're having, and perhaps one of you could lend me a pipe. *And* a bit of bacca. *And* a match."

The work of assisting an escaped convict seemed to be one of the rare pieces of labour that commended itself to the new friends. They introduced themselves; the name of one was Tiger, the name of the other Steak-Pudding, and these were not their real surnames, knowledge of which, indeed, would have been quite useless in Hoxton, where proclamations made at the christening-font are ignored. Tiger especially seemed proud of possessing knowledge denied to others, and being himself a man not without certain blemishes on his career, and being, moreover, something of an organiser, he took charge of the proceedings with an authority for which the narrow-faced man showed a proper, but not a servile gratitude. Indeed, as the talk went on, pride began to shine on his face, his shoulders squared, his head went back with all the consciousness of notoriety. Tiger's idea was to form a small and select committee, made up of men who, because they themselves had acquaintance with certain hardships, would sympathise keenly with anyone who had eluded the hands of justice; these were to arrange a sing-song, and tickets would be handed away only to the reliable, and without giving any assurance except that printed on them—namely, that the concert was for the benefit of one in trouble. When Steak-Pudding had to leave in order to meet his master, who was returning from Kempton and might require assistance in getting home from Waterloo, Tiger took sole charge of the interesting new friend, and found a room for him in Haberdasher Street, where he satisfied a cautious landlady by guaranteeing the rent on his word of honour, his soul, his body, and his life; further promising to eat his boots if the money were not at the end of the first week forthcoming.

"And mind you keep yourself dark, old man," he advised in an undertone. "Don't you venture to set your foot out of doors without consultin' me first. See what I mean?"

"I put meself entirely in your 'ands."

"Above all, no writing, mind, no communicatin' in any shape *or* form with the wife. I know it's 'ard."

"It's almost unbearable," agreed the other, sighing. "Lor! what a meeting it would be. How all the little ones would 'urry up, a-hugging at me knees and calling out 'Daddy, Daddy! 'ome at last. Where 'ave you been all this long time?' "

The new lodger in Haberdasher Street found it necessary to play a fresh character when the old landlady came to inquire about tea, and his views on relishes for that meal. He told her he had discharged himself from Government employ because of some difference of opinion with those set over him, he being one of those—rightly or wrongly—on the side of freedom, whilst the superior officials, affected by the unreasoning prejudices of their race, were obstinately against this view; he had simply thrown up the job and strolled off without saying a word to anybody. The landlady expressed guarded commiseration, remarking that these were no times to throw oneself out of employ, and that it was easier to lose a job than to get one. To all this the new lodger agreed as a general principle, and the landlady could not well object when he suggested that she should obtain for him seven cigars from the shop round the corner, and place the shilling to his account in the weekly bill.

This was but the first act of a generous course of behaviour. Tiger returned that evening with Steak-Pudding and with an honest and trustworthy friend, but not so honest and not so trustworthy that he had succeeded during past years in escaping conflict with the powers which administer laws. A secret council of three was held in the bed sitting-room of Haberdasher Street, with the new lodger stationed on the landing to see that no one listened. Presently he was called in to hear the result of the deliberations.

"Shut the door, my friend," said Tiger kindly, "and take a seat somewhere. We've been giving a lot of trouble to this case of yours, and a lot of thought, and a lot of what not; and now the time's come when I've got one or two suggestions to make."

"I want some'ing more'n suggestions," he remarked surlily. "My unfortunate position ought to appeal to men like you; and if," he went on, with more spirit, as he noted the respectful attitude of the councillors, "if all you can offer me is words and advice, and so forth, why I may jest as well step over to Kingsland Road Police Station and give meself up!"

"No, no!" they cried urgently.

"You mustn't think of that," declared Tiger, adding emphatic words.

"But consider what I've gone through," he argued defiantly. "Sleeping out under 'edges at night——"

"I've told 'em," said Tiger soothingly. "Don't go labouring under the impression, old sort, that we can't realise it all. What you've to remember is that you've got clean away, whereas many another—a better man p'raps—would have been caught."

"What do you mean," he demanded heatedly, "by 'a better man'? I take that as a 'ighly uncalled-for reflection on my character. Fer two pins——"

The other members interposed. They were sure Tiger meant no harm by his casual remark (and this view Tiger supported by strenuous declaration); on the other hand, it was quite right of the first party to resent it, if he thought for a single moment that any slur had been cast on his character. Rather grudgingly he consented to shake hands with Tiger; the two men warned Tiger that he must really be more careful in future, and Tiger called Heaven to witness that he might be clumsy, but that a man with less desire to create bad blood did not exist.

"Returning to the subject," said Tiger, when calm had been restored, "what do you say to working your passage out to Australia or to New Zealand or somewheres?"

"On a ship?"

"Yes," admitted Tiger, "on a ship."

"Sooner'n do that," shouted the man, slapping the table, "I'd go and join the Salvation Army."

"Don't be so hasty, old man," urged Tiger. "We don't want you to do anything against your will."

"*I'll* take precious good care of that."

"Then what about a few quiet months away in the country—us paying your fare and seeing you off—and you working quietly on a farm?"

"You seem to keep on 'arping on work," said the man, irritated, "as though it was something anyone wanted to do for their 'ealth. I tell you straight— I've had enough of hard labour the eighteen months I've been in."

"The newspapers," remarked Steak-Pudding, "said a year!"

"Now then!" he said, with a forced politeness, "do the newspapers know better than me, or do I know better than the newspapers? Kindly answer me that question."

"Course you know best," said Tiger, looking reproachfully at the interrupter. "Stands to reason."

"I tell you what," he declared, "I put up with a lot of things, but I won't be bullied, not by you nor by anyone like you. You sit 'ere arranging all this vurry nicely to suit your own purposes, but you never seem to think of asking me what *I'd* like to see done. That's the last thing that occurs to you. You're all self—that's what you are. I put it to you now; has one of you—has a single individual amongst you, suggested for a single moment whilst you've been 'ere cackling—has one of you suggested sending out to get something for me to eat and drink? I ask you."

"It shall be rem'died at once. How does a bit of fish strike you?"

"It's a wonder to me," he said, appealing to a portrait of the lady of a draper's almanack on the wall, "it's a wonder to me how on earth I manage to keep my temper as I do. Bit of fish, indeed! 'Pon me word, I was better off where I was!"

"No, no!" they said appealingly. "Don't get that idea into your silly 'ead." One added, "What about a chop, old man?"

"If it's overdone," he replied doggedly, "if it's the least bit overdone, I shan't so much as look at it."

The members of the committee, anxious as they were to render to their interesting friend all the assistance that such a hero could fairly claim, were forced to admit privately to each other that their man was of an exacting nature, that (in their own words) he never knew when he had enough. Fortunately, he was quite willing to stay indoors. They brought to him editions of the evening papers, which he looked at—this was, of course, quite natural—with some eagerness, giving a sigh of relief when he found that the escape no longer occupied a space in these public journals. The committee running short of money, an opulent bookmaker (Steak-Pudding's master), who used a public-house in Kingsland Road, had to be added to their number, and he, with all the enthusiasm of an amateur, placed silver and gold at their disposal, amply repaid by permission to be smuggled into the house one night and the high privilege of listening to the sulky account, given once more, of the escape by the narrow-faced man.

"You're a 'aving it all your own way," he grumbled when he had finished. "I'm one of the jays, I am."

It was only after weeks of argument that he was induced to recognise the fact that he could not be subsidised for all time; that he could not stay on in Haberdasher Street for the rest of his life; that, hard as it might seem, he would have to set to and do something. Wherefore, with many reproaches against them for their unsympathetic haste, and strongly worded expressions of regret that he had not fallen into good hands, he agreed that the benefit concert should be arranged, by which means a lump sum of money would be obtained and he could be conveyed to Cardiff, where cargo vessels sometimes left for distant ports. Tiger proposed to give himself the duty of seeing him to Cardiff, but to this suggestion the man gave no encouragement; he did not mind being escorted to Paddington, but once outside the station and the money handed over, then—farewell! He expressed a fervent hope that he had never done anything in the past to justify them in suspecting that he was not to be trusted. "Me word," he declared, "is as good as me bond."

It was arranged that the *bénéficiaire* should go to Cardiff on the night of the concert with the money obtained by the sale of tickets, no less a sum than eleven pounds eight shillings was obtained before the day, and Tiger, thankful beyond expression that his task was so nearly finished, took the account of sales round to Haberdasher Street.

"Yes," said the narrow-faced man, looking crossly at the columns on the sheet of paper. "And how much you kep' back for yourself?"

"'Ark to me, old sort," said Tiger, with sudden spirit. "I don't want to be rough on you, but if you can't leave off grumblin' now that we've got to nearly the end of the business, I shall simply pop that cash back into the bag and leave you to your own bloomin' resources—see?"

"I'm fond of you," said the man, relaxing his aggressive demeanour; "but I wish you'd got a sense of humour. Somehow or other you never see a joke."

"I know most jokes," remarked Tiger, "and this ain't one of 'em."

"You seem to forget all I've gone through."

"You don't give us a chance of doing that," said Tiger shortly.

The man held out his hand impulsively.

"Loogere," he said, "let bygones be bygones. There must be a certain amount of give-and-take in this world."

"You seem to be all take."

"I thought you'd got a soft 'eart, Tiger," he remarked plaintively.

"I 'ave," replied Tiger. "But I ain't got a soft head. And whilst we're on the subject, let me warn you about what you're expected to do on the night of the concert. There'll be a private invitation meeting in a small room off the 'All, and there you'll be interduced to a few select friends, and what I want to advise you to do is this—*make yourself agreeable!*"

"Ain't I always?"

"Show a spirit of what I may call thankfulness. Don't give us any of your nasty snacks. Put a grateful smile on your face, and keep it there. Leave off that 'abit of growling."

"You chaps expect a lot for your money," he remarked sulkily.

"We do!" said Tiger. "But up to the present we 'aven't had any."

"You ought to 'ave been a Russian," he said dispiritedly, "that's what you ought. You don't seem to recognise the risk I run."

"Bless my soul!" exclaimed Tiger vehemently, "why shouldn't you? You take upon yourself to break out of quod, don't you? Very well, then! You make your way up 'ere, where you ain't known, and we play the Good Seemaritan, don't we? Very well again. We keep you in the lap of luxury——" The other man looked round the room and gave a derisive laugh. "I repeat it—the lap of luxury—all these weeks, you doing nothing but eat, drink, and make merry, and read all the newspapers you can get 'old of."

"Naturally I read all the newspapers. Don't I want to see whether——" He stopped. "*You* know what I mean," he went on with some confusion. "I want to see if there's anything about me in print. You don't seem to be able to put yourself in my place."

"I sh'd be sorry to," said Tiger.

It was on the very afternoon of the benefit day that a lad went down Haberdasher Street selling the evening paper. The lodger, taking the air in his shirt-sleeves, threw down a penny, and the lad, after one or two efforts, succeeded in throwing a copy to the first floor. There was no racing that day, and the trouble of selling evening journals was great: the lad went on whistling.

"Abs'lutely nothing in the paper," he grumbled. " 'Pon me word, I wonder they trouble to print 'em, and— 'Ello, 'ello, *'el*-lo!"

In the stop-press column was printed unevenly the following item of news:

> The convict who escaped a month since was recaptured this morning in the village adjacent to the prison, where it appears he has all the time been in hiding.

. . . .

Near Nile Street he ran in his hurry against Tiger, who was standing outside the favourite public-house. To Tiger he explained that a wire had come announcing the earlier departure of the boat from Cardiff. Tiger, putting off all other business, accompanied him to Paddington; gave over so much of the proceeds as he had about him, and the man, taking a ticket privately for Westbourne Park, handed to him, in bidding him farewell, the copy of the evening paper.

"When a thing gets too hot to 'old," he said, as the train went out, and he watched Tiger reading the announcement, "that's the time to let it drop."

A. ST. JOHN ADCOCK

(1864–1930)

ARTHUR ST. JOHN ADCOCK, who was for many years editor of the *Bookman*, at an early age abandoned law for literature, and in so doing found his true vocation. He was at once poet, essayist, and novelist. Among his many works are *London Etchings* (1904), *Love in London* (1906), *The Shadow Show* (1907), *Billicks* (1909), and *Songs of the World War* (1916).

"The Last Chapter," which appeared originally in *With the Gilt Off* (1923), was specially revised by the author, by whose kind permission it is here reprinted.

THE LAST CHAPTER

THE yellow blinds were drawn down to shut out the fierce glare of the sun; the open windows seemed gasping in suffocation, but could catch no breath of air; and the long, quiet ward, with its dreary vista of bedridden patients, was oppressively close.

Two Sisters, chatting in listless undertones, sat by a small table near the open doorway. Dull yellow shadows of the blinds chequered the floor at regular intervals; a sickly miasma of hyacinths and medicines thickened the dry, hot atmosphere and put a thought of death into the brooding quiet of the place.

Suddenly a door slammed somewhere at the other end of the building, and a flying echo flapped and fluttered headlong down the corridor without, plunged into the surrounding silence, and was instantly stifled.

Then another sound grew out of the stillness, and the echoing corridor was fretted by crisp footfalls.

"Chaplain," muttered one of the nurses; and the other mechanically took up some sewing.

The Chaplain came in—a spare, pale man of fifty, with large mild eyes and a pensive kindly expression. He shook hands with the nurses and stood chatting with them in undertones.

"And how is the new patient—No. 20?"

"He had a good night and seemed a little better this morning, but doctor says there is no hope—he can't last many days."

"Have you let his friends know?"

"He says he has none."

"Poor fellow! Poor fellow!"

He moved off along the melancholy avenue of narrow beds, glancing to right and left on weary white faces of men who were asleep, and lingered awhile, here and there, to speak in sympathetic murmurs to such as happened to be awake. No. 20 had watched his approach with evident interest, and greeted his arrival with a wan, peculiar smile which the other was at a loss to interpret.

"You were asleep when I came through the ward yesterday," observed the Chaplain, seating himself by the bed.

"Not really. I saw you all right," No. 20 said feebly, "but I kept my eyes shut—didn't want to have anything to say to anyone just then—I was feeling pretty bad."

"But you are better to-day?"

"Not much. . . . I was sorry, though, yesterday, after you'd gone. I only had a glimpse of you, but it struck me at once that I'd seen you before. When I opened my eyes to have another look you were gone. I worried myself trying to think where I'd seen you, and couldn't; till I asked Sister what your name was."

"Yes? And do you know me?"

"Do I not!" he chuckled. "Don't you remember me at all?"

The Chaplain gazed critically at the shrunken, haggard face on the pillow, and shook his head. His eyes wandered to the card hung above the bed, and he read the patient's name: "Richard Fairfax."

"You won't know that name," said the other, following his gaze. "I've changed it once or twice since we met last. You knew me by my own respectable, original name, Richard Marston."

"Dick Marston? Never!" The Chaplain was startled and, leaning forward, scanned the worn features again, with a twilight recognition glimmering in his eyes. "Well—well—but I should never have known you. You are sadly changed."

"In more ways than one," Marston laughed wryly. "And the beard makes a big difference."

He reached out a wasted hand, which the Chaplain grasped with a sort of shy cordiality, and, the first excitement of their strange meeting having spent itself, they presently drifted into intimate talk of far-away days and old friends.

"I suppose I've come to as bad an end as the worst of them," said Marston.

The Chaplain muttered deprecatingly.

"Oh, but it is the end. No use trying to pretend it isn't!" cried the sick man with feeble recklessness. "I shall be carried out of here feet first within a week, and I'm not sorry about it either. I'm fairly fed up with everything."

A spasm of pain distorted his features and brought a clammy sweat oozing through his parched skin.

"What have I been doing with myself all these years?" he answered when the agony subsided. "Well, you wouldn't like to hear most of it. I've been all over the world doing all those things I ought not to have done nearly all the time. I've just kicked over the traces and gone to the devil, and you know who first sent me on the way there, don't you?"

The Chaplain shook his head and maintained a grave silence.

"We were simpletons, then, and she fooled us both," chuckled Marston, fluctuating between flippancy and earnestness. "I used to hate you, because I fancied you were the lucky man. But she never cared a straw for either of us. My God, though!—I loved her in those days, Ireton! I don't believe you ever cared for her as I did—nobody could. And she was only playing with us—no more heart than a fish, damn her! . . . Sorry! . . . Of course, she snapped up that other fellow—I forget his name—for his money. It was impossible to believe it of her—then. Youth—youth, how good it is, but what an ass, Ireton! When I first heard it, I could have shot myself. Wonder I didn't. Went mad, straight off, and I've been mad, more or less, ever since. . . . It burnt you a little too, old man, I suppose?"

"At the time," the Chaplain grudgingly admitted, with a gesture as if he would wave the subject aside.

"Ah! But you were always one of the quiet sort who never catch anything too bad to be cured by a poultice. I daresay it spoilt your appetite for a couple of days; then you got up in the morning, combed your hair as usual, put on a clean collar, and . . . by the way, not the kind of collar you are wearing now. You were going in for the Law at that time, weren't you? How did you come to adopt the Church?"

The Chaplain blushed.

"I think we have talked quite enough. Too much," he said nervously. "The doctor will be blaming me for letting you excite yourself."

Marston glanced up at him curiously, and his heavy eyes twinkled.

"I'm not excited, old chap. . . . Don't say she had anything to do with it?"

The Chaplain flushed and frowned and shook his head.

"Well," Marston went on, with a grim archness, "it's a queer drink that makes one man blind drunk and another sober! . . . Don't go for a minute, my dear fellow. It doesn't excite me a bit to talk about her now—how could it, after all these years? It used to. But I'm not a lovesick youngster now. There have been other women since her—perhaps too many of them. In fact, I'd forgotten her till the sight of you yesterday reminded me. Once I could not help remembering—I was always remembering, and trying my damnedest not to . . . Why, I believe I used to think of her, even when I cursed her and said she'd sold herself to the highest bidder, as you might think of an angel in Heaven, and everything I did to forget her seemed to sink me farther and farther away from her. What sentimental fools we all are, Ireton! One woman's no different from another, but, do you know, even yet when I think about her—I was thinking of her in the night (all through the sight of you reminding me)—it's rather like thinking of prayers you've given up saying. You know how I mean. . . . Have you seen anything of her—since?"

The Chaplain shook his head again.

"Twenty years," said Marston, musingly. . . . "Ever heard of her?"

"In a way—indirectly—occasionally. Her husband, the Honourable Paul Ainsleigh——"

"That's the name. I knew it was the Honourable something."

"He is a prominent man in politics, and she is popular in society——"

"She would be!"

"I saw in the papers the other day they have been travelling, but are back in town again."

"Here—in London? but, of course, they would have a place here."

"In Grosvenor Square."

"Somehow I can't imagine her in London. I always see her in that sunny old garden—you remember the garden?—and once upon a time, now and then, the sight of flowers, or the scent of them, used to make my heart ache."

The Chaplain coughed, and referred to his watch; and, being by now fatigued and sleepy, Marston made no further effort to detain him.

In some subtle, indefinable fashion, their common misfortune was as a tie of brotherhood between them. They had compassion for each other, each knowing by personal experience what the other had suffered. Ireton, whose memories of the past had long been frozen into silence, was uncomfortably stirred and disquieted by the fervid utterance this friendless outcast gave to regrets that had once been also his. It broke up the ice of many winters and set old founts of feeling flowing darkly again within him. It unsettled him; troubled him; withal, he was strangely drawn toward this man, so linked with his dead yesterdays, and anxious for his welfare.

Late at night he went to the door of the shadowy ward to ask after him; and saw next morning, with a genuine concern, that he was much altered for the worse. His eyes were bright and restless, his gaunt face greyer, his hand more feverish.

"I was hoping you'd come," said Marston hoarsely. "I had almost made up my mind to send for you."

"I'd have come earlier if I had known."

"Not because I wanted you to pray for me," with a fleeting smile. "But, I say, I dreamt about her last night. And it didn't seem like dreaming—too real to be a dream. Odd, wasn't it? Then I woke up, and couldn't get her out of my mind, and it kept me awake. I kept thinking, and thinking, and thinking of her till all that old business seemed as fresh and near as if it had only happened last week. Do you know—look here! I want to ask a favour, Ireton. . . . I say, I hope you won't think me a hopeless lunatic or that I've gone delirious, will you?"

He laughed awkwardly and, before Ireton could answer, resumed: "I've got a most damned awful hankering to see her again. A sort of hungry, thirsty, silly longing to see her again, old man. I don't understand it, but it has got into me and taken such hold on me that I can't get rid of the idea. I simply feel I must see her once more before I finish up. A sick man's fancy, I expect, but call it what you like, it's no good—I can't shake it off. Do you think she would come if she knew? I believe she would."

He spoke rapidly, eagerly, yet in such strained, muffled tones that though the patient in the next bed was awake and listening he could not overhear what was said.

"It would not be wise," Ireton began, vaguely scared by the suggestion. "It would only upset you. It would be too painful——"

"Not a bit of it! Not now. I haven't got more than a day or two left—don't contradict me—I know; I might snuff out to-day, and I feel somehow I must see her, just for the last time. We're not likely, I suppose, to meet afterwards," he laughed grimly, "and it seems as if I'd made up my mind I must see her again before I go. When I've seen her, I don't care—it's the last thing I shall want, and I'll be satisfied. If I'm dotty I can't help it. . . . Look here, Ireton, will you go and ask her? Don't say you won't, and don't try to persuade me it's all foolishness. It keeps me worrying—wanting to see her. You'd go and try, anyhow, if you knew how I feel."

He was so tremulously eager, so piteously, irrationally in earnest, that Ireton could not bring himself to evade the issue with a flat refusal, and, finding his halting attempts at dissuasion altogether futile, he reluctantly yielded, and was gone and speeding in a taxi toward Grosvenor Square before he fairly realised the extremely unusual and delicate character of his mission.

One minute he was overwhelmed with a sense of his folly in thus humouring the extravagant whim of a man who was too ill to know quite what he was saying, and he was seized with a fear that she would consider his request an impertinence and resent it; but a minute after he was reproving himself for crediting her with so little womanly sympathy. Then, in a flash, his mind was dazzled with a vision of her as he had known her—gracious and sweet and girlishly beautiful. So recollecting her, he recollected also impetuous, passionate things he had said to her, and how she had once given herself to his arms, and he shrank ashamedly now, as at the thought of some indelicacy, from the prospect of seeing her again, and could not have forced himself to go on if he had not been haunted by those sleepless eyes that were watching for his return.

Every nerve in his body was quivering with the intensity of his excitement. Over and over he was asking himself: Would she receive him? Would she recognise him? What should he say to her? Remembrance of the charm of her presence alternately drew him on and repelled him, and, still agitated by these bewildering impulses, he presently found himself knocking at the door of her house in Grosvenor Square.

He did not send in his name, but asked the footman to tell Mrs. Ainsleigh that the Chaplain of St. Simeon's Hospital urgently desired to see her.

As he mechanically followed the man upstairs, after losing his last hope while he waited for his message to be taken in, his bewilderment increased to a sort of suppressed frenzy, till he became aware, with a curious sense of having suddenly revived from a swoon, that he was in a spacious, pleasantly appointed drawing-room, and that a portly lady, who had risen at his entrance, was cooingly, somewhat gushingly, wishing him good morning.

She was utterly strange to him. She was stout of figure and plump of face; an affable indifference peered from her placid eyes; her features were rather blunt and coarse and her cheeks were artistically powdered.

"Mrs. Ainsleigh?"

It was himself that spoke, yet his voice had an alien sound.

"Ye-es. Won't you sit down?"

He being a clergyman from a hospital, she was possibly anticipating an appeal for some kind of patronage.

"I have called," he stammered. "I have ventured to call on an errand which—which—for which I trust you will forgive me. It is most—er—unusual——"

"Oh, not at all!" she interposed, with a vague politeness.

"It is, I am afraid, a very unusual request, but—I have called on behalf of a patient at St. Simeon's—a Mr. Richard Marston."

"Ye-es? Let me see now; surely I know that name?"

She smiled vacuously, and paused for him to proceed.

To sit there and regard this woman, grown so unlike all he had ever known or dreamed of her, numbed and stupefied him. He had never foreseen such a grotesque transformation, and could not easily convince himself of its reality. Yet he knew well enough it was she, and was stung with an odd humiliation that this should be his saint, his goddess, the woman who had cast so dark a shadow over his life and influenced it so profoundly.

"Mr. Richard Marston," he repeated absently; then, recovering himself, "Mr. Marston used to know you—many years ago, before you were married."

"I have known so many men," she laughed self-consciously. "But, yes, the name is familiar to me—I remember it now perfectly. How interesting! How sad! Of course—yes—Mr. Marston; I knew him very well. And is he in the hospital? Not very ill, I hope? Nothing dangerous?"

As briefly as might be Ireton disposed of her inquiries, and made her acquainted with the object of his visit.

"Really? And he wants to see me again? How very romantic of him! I daresay he has told you, we used to be boy and girl sweethearts —nothing serious," she smiled archly. "Oh, yes, I recollect him very, very well. And he has asked. . . . It is very unusual, as you say, and, dear me, how strange of him!"

"It is strange—it is unusual—it must seem presumptuous," faltered Ireton. "I would never have consented to approach you with such a message but—he is dying, and he is friendless—almost friendless. He cannot live another day, and is so terribly anxious to see you—for old times' sake—a sick man's fancy—but—but——"

"How sad—how dreadfully sad! Poor man! I am so sorry. I hardly know what to say—it seems so—but in such very sad circumstances, if you tell me he is so really anxious—I do not see how I can refuse. It is—well, after all these years—it is most curious that he should want to see me. But—what shall I do? What would you advise? . . . Very well. Would you like me to come with you now? I suppose I ought to? Yes—very well. If you will wait a few minutes while I get ready —I shall not keep you long."

Left alone, Ireton sat mute and numbed, past analysing his sensations or feeling any more; and after a brief interval she returned to accompany him.

All emotion was exhausted in him for the present, except one of thankfulness that she had not recognised him. She chatted amiably as they rode together in the taxi, and he answered her, but precisely what she said and what he replied he could never afterwards recall.

Their arrival sent a little thrill of surprise rippling ahead of them all along the ward. The thin, sharp rustle of her silks summoned ghostly faces up from among white bedclothes to right and left, and glassy eyes stared at them as they passed. But no eyes stared so wonderingly as did those of No. 20; Ireton was conscious that the light faded from them suddenly, that their questioning glances wavered from himself to her, and he evaded them, for he could not bear to see in them the reflection of his own derangement.

He escorted her to the bedside, and said quietly:

"This is Mr. Marston, Mrs. Ainsleigh."

She clasped the man's lean hand effusively, and putting up her *pince-nez* graciously inspected him.

"And is it really Mr. Marston? I declare, I do not think I should have known you. You are so changed—but then, of course, you have been ill, poor man, and it is so long ago—and illness does make such a difference, doesn't it? You must take great care of yourself, and I do hope you will soon be better. I hope you are well looked after?" She swept the ward with her glasses. "Beautifully clean and bright and airy, is it not? You are comfortable here? So glad. It is so long since we last met. You have had some sad misfortune to bring you to this—but I must not ask you about that now. I can see you are not strong enough to talk. Such a long time—you will, no doubt, notice changes in me, too. Ah, dear!" she sighed. "I have not forgotten the old times. I am sorry you are so poorly, but you will have the best of medical attention here, and you must take care of yourself and do all you can to get better. . . ."

Ireton strolled away beyond hearing. Her vapid tones and shallow, disjointed vivacity of speech and manner irritated him, jarred upon him, less because of their unlikeness to the looks and tones of the girl he had known than because, in some incongruous fashion, they actually were like them. Yearning to escape from sight and sound of her, he wandered up and down the gloomy corridor outside, peering in at the door from time to time, until he saw she was about to depart. Then, having accompanied her downstairs and handed her into the waiting taxi, he went irresolutely back, and sat down by Marston's bed.

For several minutes neither of them spoke.

Marston lay with his eyes closed, but Ireton was aware that he was not asleep, and by and by he glanced up and said, as if continuing a conversation:

"And you never told her who you were?"

"No need to."

Marston lay still, except for an occasional twitching of his lips.

"Good God!" he ejaculated suddenly. "I made sure you must have made a mistake—it took my breath away at first! But it was her right enough." He broke into low, irrepressible laughter. "Well, perhaps I'm the better off of the two of us, after all, old chap. I've seen her—and now I can do my dying comfortably. She promised to come again—but I don't want to wait for her! I say, what damned fools we have been, Ireton."

The Chaplain made as if he would speak, but said nothing.

"You feel sore about it. No wonder. I don't care so much myself, somehow. But fancy!"—the shrunken, bony figure was convulsed with silent amusement—"fancy you going to Heaven and me to Hell for such a woman as that!" He laughed, still in silence, till the tears ran down his cheeks. "I can't help thinking," he checked his merriment to add with an unctuous chuckle, "We shan't both go to the same place, Ireton—I wonder which of us'll meet her?"

CLIVE HOLLAND

(1866–)

CLIVE HOLLAND is novelist, journalist, and lecturer. One of his great successes was *My Japanese Wife* (1895), and this he followed with more stories with Japan as the background. He is the author of *Marcelle of the Latin Quarter* (1900), *The Heart of O Hana San* (1902), *The Cinema Star* (1917), and a considerable number of other works of fiction.

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THE WOOING OF O SASA SAN

WHEN young Robertson came out to Nagasaki to manage a branch of Robertson and Goodbody, Ltd., shipping agents, he had but the most hazy ideas of Japanese life and the Japanese people. On the *hatoba* where the office stood were other shipping agents' depots, and it was not unnatural that he should at first make acquaintances in a similar line of business to his own. Old Williams, who had been his firm's chief clerk at No. 6, The Bund, for many years, had not lost the confidence of his employers, but it was thought that his methods of business were somewhat old-fashioned, and that young Robertson would instil new blood into the concern.

Away in front of the office stretched the tranquil waters of one of the finest harbours in the world, partly encircled by green, tree-clad hills and approached by a narrow land-locked channel, in which mat-sailed junks struggled with the rushing tide even when there was a fairish wind in the open. Along the *hatoba* stood—in those days—the rickety shed-like offices and warehouses, which Robertson imagined a puff of wind would lift bodily into the harbour; but many puffs of wind had rocked them to and fro and caused them to creak in a mournful, complaining manner without anything more disastrous happening. Komatsu's office was quite close to that of Robertson and Goodbody, and this astute Japanese with his comical face and small twinkling eyes soon became acquainted with the latest griffin (new arrival). Komatsu always cultivated European acquaintances, for one thing it served to keep his English, such as it was, in good working order, and for another he was not above taking tips which would advance his own interests in business.

"You like velly much out here," he said to Robertson, "when you know great many peoples."

And Robertson smiled a somewhat unconvinced assent.

There was also MacPherson, who, with an Edinburgh degree for medicine, had drifted into tea, and who, as it were, physicked a few of his friends whose European stomachs revolted when they were ill at the idea of concoctions prepared by the grandiloquent of Tajiro-ya, who was considered the leading native doctor.

Robertson felt so homesick for the first few weeks that he willingly accompanied Komatsu almost anywhere, and there was soon in consequence scarcely a tea-house or a place of entertainment that he had not visited, and he speedily knew all the pretty geishas by sight at the Fuji-ya in Irabayashigo, or at the Hanazona in Nishiyama Go, even if he could not at once master the somewhat complicated names by which these charming young ladies were blessed.

"That is Miss Pink Cherryblossom over there," Komatsu would exclaim, pointing to a pretty-faced geisha in the gayest of *kimonos* and a wonderfully tied *obi*. Or, "She with the yellow *kimono* with the blue irises on it is Miss Goyomatsu. She dances wonderfully, and old Uyeno was lucky to get her to leave the tea-house by the Running River in Yedo."

Robertson looked at the girl indicated and nodded assent. He was not in a position to gainsay anything that Komatsu might like to assert, and when the pretty little woman, having sung her song and shuffled her little dance upon the square of white matting prepared for the purpose, mixed with her audience and came smiling to know what the new Englishman required, he could only admit that she was charming and that her eyes, turned with a peculiar look towards him, were, to use MacPherson's rather vulgar simile, bright enough almost to make gimlet holes.

He, of course, soon found that it was very slow work simply attending to business during the day in a stuffy little office about 12 ft. by 8 ft., rendered incredibly dusty at times by the gusts of wind blowing along the *hatoba*, leaving fragments of matting, rice husks, coal dust, and dust rubbed off bales of merchandise, handled roughly by coolies, which lay in piles along the waterside awaiting shipment. But the sights of the town soon palled even when witnessed under the guidance of Komatsu and accompanied by his cynical remarks.

It was not long before a little geisha in the tea-house of Twenty-five Plum Trees—as a matter of fact, no one had ever been able to count more than half a dozen—attracted his attention. MacPherson and Komatsu smiled and winked at each other when the fact came under their notice. It was a form of complaint which sooner or later seized all Europeans.

Miss O Sasa San was indeed an attractive little person. She was not very tall, and that accounted for the fact that the name which had been given her was the Honourable Miss Dwarf Bamboo. She was very fragile-looking and, it might be added, mischievous. The latter quality she had probably acquired by a more or less long intercourse with Europeans. Probably this was only of a year or two's standing, but the geisha was an acquisitive little mortal, and had soon learned that few Europeans could resist her when smiling her sweetest and dancing her best. Komatsu warned Robertson in a fatherly sort of way that O Sasa San was very fickle.

"She like Europeans," he said, wagging his head wisely as he sat one afternoon in the most comfortable chair in Robertson's stuffy little office, adding as though to destroy any rancour his remark might have raised in Robertson's mind, "and she like you, too."

Robertson, seated at his writing-table nibbling the end of a quill, of which he had brought a big store from England, and wondering if it were possible to be hotter than he was without melting, smiled rather sheepishly. After all, it is a poor satisfaction to hear that the young lady you admire likes you as she has previously liked a large and imposing array of other men. But if Komatsu the wise, who gave away so much good advice and practised so few of his precepts himself, imagined that what he had said would complete the cure of Robertson and remove from his mind for more than a fraction of a moment the image of O Sasa San, he was mistaken. Frankly, Robertson did not believe that O Sasa San could have cared for others as she apparently cared for him. In fact, he said to MacPherson as he walked up the Teramachi in the cool of the evening, "I don't care what Komatsu says: O Sasa San would never look at a chap like she does unless she liked him."

MacPherson laughed. He had himself been through it all before. He, too, had fancied that a certain little geisha belonging to a somewhat obscure tea-house in the Imamachi had cared for him in precisely the same way, but he had not long ago discovered that Miss Hōnoki—for that was the little lady's name—had cared merely for the yen with which he was prepared to supply her.

It was really wonderful the progress that Robertson made in colloquial, if not very correct, Japanese in the few months which elapsed between his landing and the time when both Komatsu and MacPerson realised there was something serious in his infatuation for little O Sasa San. And these two also noticed that the desire for their company decreased in almost direct ratio with his acquisition of the Japanese language. They shrugged their shoulders and practically abandoned him to his fate.

Every night saw Robertson at the tea-house witnessing with a show of interest that was almost pathetic the stereotyped items of the programme of entertainment provided by the proprietor for the amusement of his guests. But one item always caused him to evince more than usual interest, and that was the dance and song, the latter a plaintive trifle, of little O Sasa San. This sort of thing went on for some months, till one evening Komatsu and MacPherson were very much astonished to meet Robertson and O Sasa San promenading together in Yawatamachi, evidently on their way to the theatre. Such a proceeding could only indicate something serious, and both of them decided it was time to take counsel together on the situation. Next morning Komatsu called at Robertson's office, and with a show of diplomacy which put him from the start somewhat at a disadvantage, opened fire upon Robertson himself.

"You are very foolish," said Komatsu, wisely wagging his head and looking across the desk at Robertson, who sat, quite unruffled, in a white duck suit.

"Why?" said the latter calmly.

"Why!" echoed Komatsu, "because you have taken O Sasa San from old Ujiro, and now you will have to keep her."

Robertson laughed.

There was something very amusing in this plain-spokenness of Komatsu, who was quite ignorant that poor little O Sasa San had taken up her residence in the box-like villa placed half-way up the hillside above the foreign settlement. The aid of an American missionary had been obtained for the purpose of a European marriage.

Robertson burst out laughing and exclaimed boisterously, "Look here, old chap, you need not bother your head about my affairs or those of O Sasa San. We shall be glad if you will come up and have some dinner to-morrow night, and if you can abstract MacPherson from his boxes of tea or inveigle him from his whisky, bring him along with you."

Komatsu merely whistled, and thought to himself that he had foreseen all this weeks ago. And so he had in a way, but in his mind the American missionary played no conspicuous part; to tell the truth, his opinion of O Sasa San was a quite unjustifiably low one.

"You were very deep," he said, rising to go and tell the news to MacPherson, "to keep all this to yourself," and there was a plaintive tone of injury in his voice, which probably came from a sense that he had had no part in the business.

He hurried away to MacPherson's office, and the two of them agreed that they would accept Robertson's invitation and climb the steep hillside to where his little home was situated. Just as the twilight was coming down from the hills and wrapping the town in the short-lived dusk and blotting out the entrance to the harbour, Komatsu and MacPherson arrived. Both felt very much as a critic would who, a friend of the artist, has been invited to inspect a new picture. In a sense they were both prepared to be disappointed. It seemed inconceivable that this little geisha maid could possess anything but the manners of a tea-house attendant. Komatsu, of course, ought to have known better, for the adaptability of his little countrywoman could not have left him much ground for astonishment. In place of the tea-house smile they found a genuine welcome, and from her little person O Sasa San seemed to have dropped like a garment any trace of obsequiousness she had acquired through the exigencies of her profession. The change in her had been very wonderful, but it was a change wrought by real and deep affection for the great Englishman she had been fortunate enough to marry. Komatsu at first attempted some of his familiarities which would have been legitimate at a tea-house, only to find that "Mrs. Robertson" was well versed in the skilful fencing with too obtrusive compliments.

To the wonder of MacPherson nothing at all remained of O Sasa San's old manner. It was, as he said—using a simile which was reminiscent of his work in the laboratory when he was working for his degree—as though one had put copper into a crucible and had afterwards found gold in its place.

"Of course," said Komatsu as they went away down the road to the town, each smoking one of Robertson's best cigars, "it is impossible that he can care for her long."

And many people would have been inclined to agree with him—many people, that is, who know nothing of the loneliness which comes to one in a foreign clime, or the delightful charm and adaptability of some of the little Japanese women.

Two years went by, and one morning Robertson came tearing into Komatsu's office in search of MacPherson, whose assistance he needed. In the little house up on the hillside O Sasa San lay stricken with smallpox, which, though common enough in Nagasaki, and indeed in Japan, presented such horrors to both her and Robertson. MacPherson was one of those who did not know what fear was. He made no pretence of being brave, but he was undoubtedly inherently so. Five minutes later both men were on their way up the hillside, and a few minutes of their rapid walking served to bring them to the little garden gate.

From the first glance at O Sasa San, who lay stretched on a thin white mattress on the spotlessly white matting floor, MacPherson had doubts of her recovery. But he said nothing of his fear to her husband, but told him he had better clear out and hand O Sasa San over to one of her relatives or some other woman who had already had the disease. But this Robertson would not for a moment listen to, and during the ensuing weeks he nursed, almost without intermission, O Sasa San, in company with the woman that MacPherson had sent from the town.

One evening, just as the sun was sinking over the hills and the long shadows of the latter were falling into the agate-hued water of the harbour, O Sasa San opened her eyes. For a moment or two the strength which MacPherson had told Robertson was ebbing so rapidly seemed to have flowed back into her, and she raised herself just a little on one elbow.

In a corner of the room stood her toilet glass, a polished steel mirror fixed to a strangely shaped lacquer box which contained several small drawers.

"I want it," she said very softly.

The words came with difficulty, and anxious to gratify her, Robertson rose from his position near her side, and crossing the room, took it up and brought it towards her. "There," she said, and she pointed to a spot on the floor where she could look into it. But the room was so dark by reason of the *shoji* (paper panel) having been closed, the air being admitted through a narrow passage which let in very little light, that neither could Robertson see her clearly nor she see herself at all in the polished mirror.

She laid one of her hands on his and said very softly, "More light."

He demurred, because MacPherson had forbidden light as though it were the plague itself.

But when she found he did not move she almost fretfully said, "More light, Shu-ru," calling him by the pet name she had given him.

And seeing that it distressed her he rose up and pushed one of the *shoji* gently back. A last beam of clear sunlight in an instant flooded the room, and striking on the face of the mirror threw a large circular patch of almost painful intensity upon the grey papering of the roof.

That sunshine was very cruel, though it seemed so bright and gay, after the darkness, for it showed the terrible ravages of the small-pox on poor little O Sasa San's face, marks of which Robertson, in the dim light of the sick room, had as yet scarcely been conscious, and of which O Sasa San herself had no knowledge at all. As she managed to raise herself and look into the mirror she gave a startled, pitiful little cry, and with one glance she fell exhausted on her cushions. The mirror had told its sad story, and whether it be East or West the story was just the same in its painfulness to a woman.

Towards evening O Sasa San became once more unconscious, and MacPherson, who was hastily summoned, with grave looks told Robertson that there was little hope.

Half-way through the night she rallied, and calling Robertson to her she said, "I do not want to live any longer, because I should be ugly, and then how could you care for me any longer?"

It was impossible for him to persuade this frail little being that she was wrong, and that ugly or pretty O Sasa San with her dear little ways would ever be to him just the same as the pretty little geisha he had married from the tea-house.

The morning came. Into the beautiful garden the sunbeams strayed through the environing trees, and fell upon the tiny paved paths, the flower beds rich in colour, and the goldfish pond into which O Sasa San used to peer at her own reflection and scatter crumbs to feed the greedily mouthing fishes.

On the mattress-like bed she lay in a tranquil slumber. Suddenly she woke, and called out in a feeble voice, "More light, more air, Shu-ru." Robertson rose from his position beside her, crossed the room and pushing back the *shoji* gently, let in a flood of sunlight on to the spotlessly white matting floor.

In through the open *shoji*, as though on one of the sunbeams, fluttered silently a huge silvery white butterfly. It seemed to hover above little O Sasa San for a moment, and then it flew out once more into the sunlight of the exquisite garden, and the soft perfumed morning air.

Robertson turned away from the open *shoji*. His eyes fell upon O Sasa San's face. It looked almost beautiful again in its peaceful calm, for with the silver-white butterfly, which in Japan is the emblem of immortality, the soul of the little native wife had gone out into the beyond and the sunlight.

E. W. HORNUNG

(1866–1921)

ERNEST WILLIAM HORNUNG, from the age of twenty, devoted himself to literature. For two years he was in Australia, and this furnished him with material for some of his earlier works of fiction. His first considerable successes were *Dead Men Tell No Tales* (1899), and *Peccavi* (1900). His entertaining stories of "Raffles" (1909) made him one of the most popular writers in the country. A dramatic version of *Raffles* had a very long run.

"Gentlemen and Players," from *Raffles*, is reprinted here by permission of the executors of the late E. W. Hornung, Messrs. John Murray, and Messrs. Charles Scribner's Sons.

GENTLEMEN AND PLAYERS

OLD Raffles may or may not have been an exceptional criminal, but as a cricketer I dare swear he was unique. Himself a dangerous bat, a brilliant field, and perhaps the very finest slow bowler of his decade, he took incredibly little interest in the game at large. He never went up to Lord's without his cricket-bag, or showed the slightest interest in the result of a match in which he was not himself engaged. Nor was this mere hateful egotism on his part. He professed to have lost all enthusiasm for the game, and to keep it up only from the very lowest motives.

"Cricket," said Raffles, "like everything else, is good enough sport until you discover a better. As a source of excitement it isn't in it with other things you wot of, Bunny, and the involuntary comparison becomes a bore. What's the satisfaction of taking a man's wicket when you want his spoons? Still, if you can bowl a bit your low cunning won't get rusty, and always looking for the weak spot's just the kind of mental exercise one wants. Yes, perhaps there's some affinity between the two things after all. But I'd chuck up cricket to-morrow, Bunny, if it wasn't for the glorious protection it affords a person of my proclivities."

"How so?" said I. "It brings you before the public, I should have thought, far more than is either safe or wise."

"My dear Bunny, that's exactly where you make a mistake. To follow crime with reasonable impunity you simply must have a parallel ostensible career—the more public the better. The principle is obvious. Mr. Peace, of pious memory, disarmed suspicion by acquiring a local reputation for playing the fiddle and taming animals, and it's my profound conviction that Jack the Ripper was a really eminent public man, whose speeches were very likely reported alongside his atrocities. Fill the bill in some prominent part, and you'll never be suspected of doubling it with another of equal prominence. That's why I want you to cultivate journalism, my boy, and sign all you can. And it's the one and only reason why I don't burn my bats for firewood."

Nevertheless, when he did play there was no keener performer on the field, nor one more anxious to do well for his side. I remember how he went to the nets, before the first match of the season, with his pocket full of sovereigns, which he put on the stumps instead of bails. It was a sight to see the professionals bowling like demons for the hard cash, for whenever a stump was hit a pound was tossed to the bowler and another balanced in its stead, while one man took £3 with a ball that spread-eagled the wicket. Raffles's practice cost him either eight or nine sovereigns; but he had absolutely first-class bowling all the time and he made fifty-seven runs next day.

It became my pleasure to accompany him to all his matches, to watch every ball he bowled, or played, or fielded, and to sit chatting with him in the pavilion when he was doing none of these three things. You might have seen us there, side by side, during the greater part of the Gentlemen's first innings against the Players (who had lost the toss) on the second Monday in July. We were to be seen, but not heard, for Raffles had failed to score, and was uncommonly cross for a player who cared so little for the game. Merely taciturn with me, he was positively rude to more than one member who wanted to know how it had happened, or who ventured to commiserate him on his luck; there he sat, with a straw hat tilted over his nose and a cigarette stuck between lips that curled disagreeably at every advance. I was, therefore, much surprised when a young fellow of the exquisite type came and squeezed himself in between us, and met with a perfectly civil reception despite the liberty. I did not know the boy by sight, nor did Raffles introduce us; but their conversation proclaimed at once a slightness of acquaintanceship and a licence on the lad's part which combined to puzzle me. Mystification reached its height when Raffles was informed that the other's father was anxious to meet him, and he instantly consented to gratify that whim.

"He's in the Ladies' Enclosure. Will you come round now?"

"With pleasure," says Raffles. "Keep a place for me, Bunny."

And they were gone.

"Young Crowley," said some voice farther back. "Last year's Harrow Eleven."

"I remember him. Worst man in the team."

"Keen cricketer, however. Stopped till he was twenty to get his colours. Governor made him. Keen breed. Oh, pretty, sir! Very pretty!"

The game was boring me. I only came to see old Raffles perform. Soon I was looking wistfully for his return, and at length I saw him beckoning me from the palings to the right.

"Want to introduce you to old Amersteth," he whispered, when I joined him. "They've a cricket week next month, when this boy Crowley comes of age, and we've both got to go down and play."

"Both!" I echoed. "But I'm no cricketer!"

"Shut up," says Raffles. "Leave that to me. I've been lying for all I'm worth," he added sepulchrally, as we reached the bottom of the steps. "I trust to you not to give the show away."

There was the gleam in his eye that I knew well enough elsewhere, but was unprepared for in those healthy, sane surroundings; and it was with very definite misgivings and surmises that I followed the Zingari blazer through the vast flower-bed of hats that bloomed beneath the ladies' awning.

Lord Amersteth was a fine-looking man with a short moustache and a double chin. He received me with much dry courtesy, through which, however, it was not difficult to read a less flattering tale. I was accepted as the inevitable appendage of the invaluable Raffles, with whom I felt deeply incensed as I made my bow.

"I have been bold enough," said Lord Amersteth, "to ask one of the Gentlemen of England to come down and play some rustic cricket for us next month. He is kind enough to say that he would have liked nothing better, but for this little fishing expedition of yours, Mr. ——, Mr. ——," and Lord Amersteth succeeded in remembering my name.

It was, of course, the first I had ever heard of that fishing expedition, but I made haste to say that it could easily, and should certainly, be put off. Raffles gleamed approval through his eyelashes. Lord Amersteth bowed and shrugged.

"You're very good, I'm sure," said he. "But I understand you're a cricketer yourself?"

"He was one at school," said Raffles, with infamous readiness.

"Not a real cricketer," I was stammering meanwhile.

"In the eleven?" said Lord Amersteth.

"I'm afraid not," said I.

"But only just out of it," declared Raffles, to my horror.

"Well, well, we can't all play for the Gentlemen," said Lord Amersteth slyly. "My son Crowley only just scraped into the eleven at Harrow, and he's going to play. I may even come in myself at a pinch; so you won't be the only duffer, if you are one, and I shall be very glad if you will come down and help us too. You shall flog a stream before breakfast and after dinner, if you like."

"I should be very proud," I was beginning, as the mere prelude to resolute excuses; but the eye of Raffles opened wide upon me; and I hesitated weakly, to be duly lost.

"Then that's settled," said Lord Amersteth, with the slightest suspicion of grimness. "It's to be a little week, you know, when my son comes of age. We play the Free Foresters, the Dorsetshire Gentlemen, and probably some local lot as well. But Mr. Raffles will tell you all about it, and Crowley shall write. Another wicket! By Jove, they're all out! Then I rely on you both." And, with a little nod, Lord Amersteth rose and sidled to the gangway.

Raffles rose also, but I caught the sleeve of his blazer.

"What are you thinking of?" I whispered savagely. "I was nowhere near the eleven. I'm no sort of cricketer. I shall have to get out of this!"

"Not you," he whispered back. "You needn't play, but come you must. If you wait for me after half-past six, I'll tell you why."

But I could guess the reason; and I am ashamed to say that it revolted me much less than did the notion of making a public fool of myself on a cricket-field. My gorge rose at this as it no longer rose at crime, and it was in no tranquil humour that I strolled about the ground while Raffles disappeared in the pavilion. Nor was my annoyance lessened by a little meeting I witnessed between young Crowley and his father, who shrugged as he stopped and stooped to convey some information which made the young man look a little blank. It may have been pure self-consciousness on my part, but I could have sworn that the trouble was their inability to secure the great Raffles without his insignificant friend.

Then the bell rang, and I climbed to the top of the pavilion to watch Raffles bowl. No subtleties are lost up there; and if ever a bowler was full of them, it was A. J. Raffles on this day, as, indeed, all the cricket world remembers. One had not to be a cricketer oneself to appreciate his perfect command of pitch and break, his beautifully easy action, which never varied with the varying pace, his great ball on the leg-stump—his dropping head-ball—in a word, the infinite ingenuity of that versatile attack. It was no mere exhibition of athletic prowess, it was an intellectual treat, and one with a special significance in my eyes. I saw the "affinity between the two things," saw it in that afternoon's tireless warfare against the flower of professional cricket. It was not that Raffles took many wickets for few runs; he was too fine a bowler to mind being hit; and time was short, and the wicket good. What I admired, and what I remember, was the combination of resource and cunning, of patience and precision, of head-work and handiwork, which made every over an artistic whole. It was all so characteristic of that other Raffles whom I alone knew!

"I felt like bowling this afternoon," he told me later—in the cab. "With a pitch to help me, I'd have done something big; as it is, three for forty-one, out of the four that fell, isn't so bad for a slow bowler on a plumb wicket against those fellows. But I felt venomous! Nothing riles me more than being asked about for my cricket as though I were a pro. myself."

"Then why on earth go?"

"To punish them, and—because we shall be jolly hard up, Bunny, before the season's over!"

"Ah!" said I. "I thought it was that."

"Of course it was! It seems they're going to have the very devil of a week of it—balls—dinner-parties—swagger house-party—general junketings—and obviously a houseful of diamonds as well. Diamonds galore! As a general rule nothing would induce me to abuse my position as a guest. I've never done it, Bunny. But in this case we're engaged like the waiters and the band, and by heaven we'll take our toll! Let's have a quiet dinner somewhere and talk it over."

"It seems rather a vulgar sort of theft," I could not help saying; and to this, my single protest, Raffles instantly assented.

"It is a vulgar sort," said he; "but I can't help that. We're getting vulgarly hard up again, and there's an end on't. Besides, these people deserve it and can afford it. And don't you run away with the idea that all will be plain sailing; nothing will be easier than getting some stuff, and nothing harder than avoiding all suspicion, as, of course, we must. We may come away with no more than a good working plan of the premises. Who knows? In any case there's weeks of thinking in it for you and me."

But with those weeks I will not weary you further than by remarking that the "thinking" was done entirely by Raffles, who did not always trouble to communicate his thoughts to me. His reticence, however, was no longer an irritant. I began to accept it as a necessary convention of these little enterprises. And, after our last adventure of the kind, more especially after its *dénouement*, my trust in Raffles was much too solid to be shaken by a want of trust in me, which I still believe to have been more the instinct of the criminal than the judgment of the man.

It was on Monday, August 10, that we were due at Milchester Abbey, Dorset; and the beginning of the month found us cruising about that very county, with fly-rods actually in our hands. The idea was that we should acquire at once a local reputation as decent fishermen, and some knowledge of the countryside, with a view to further and more deliberate operations in the event of an unprofitable week. There was another idea which Raffles kept to himself until he had got me down there. Then one day he produced a cricket-ball in a meadow we were crossing, and threw me catches for an hour together. More hours he spent in bowling to me on the nearest green; and, if I was never a cricketer, at least I came nearer to being one, by the end of that week, than ever before or since.

Incident began early on the Monday. We had sallied forth from a desolate little junction within quite a few miles of Milchester, had been caught in a shower, had run for shelter to a wayside inn. A florid, over-dressed man was drinking in the parlour, and I could have sworn it was at the sight of him that Raffles recoiled on the threshold, and afterwards insisted on returning to the station through the rain. He assured me, however, that the odour of stale ale had almost knocked him down. And I had to make what I could of his speculative, downcast eyes and knitted brows.

Milchester Abbey is a grey, quadrangular pile, deep-set in rich woody country, and twinkling with triple rows of quaint windows, every one of which seemed alight as we drove up just in time to dress for dinner. The carriage had whirled us under I know not how many triumphal arches in process of construction, and past the tents and flagpoles of a juicy-looking cricket field, on which Raffles undertook to bowl up to his reputation. But the chief signs of festival were within, where we found an enormous house-party assembled, including more persons of pomp, majesty, and dominion than I had ever encountered in one room before. I confess I felt overpowered. Our errand and my own pretences combined to rob me of an address upon which I had sometimes plumed myself; and I have a grim recollection of my nervous relief when dinner was at last announced. I little knew what an ordeal it was to prove.

I had taken in a much less formidable young lady than might have fallen to my lot. Indeed I began by blessing my good fortune in this respect. Miss Melhuish was merely the rector's daughter, and she had only been asked to make an even number. She informed me of both facts before the soup reached us, and her subsequent conversation was characterised by the same engaging candour. It exposed what was little short of a mania for imparting information. I had simply to listen, to nod, and to be thankful. When I confessed to knowing very few of those present, even by sight, my entertaining companion proceeded to tell me who everybody was, beginning on my left and working conscientiously round to her right. This lasted quite a long time, and really interested me; but a great deal that followed did not; and, obviously to recapture my unworthy attention, Miss Melhuish suddenly asked me, in a sensational whisper, whether I could keep a secret.

I said I thought I might, whereupon another question followed, in still lower and more thrilling accents:

"Are you afraid of burglars?"

Burglars! I was roused at last. The word stabbed me. I repeated it in horrified query.

"So I've found something to interest you at last!" said Miss Melhuish, in naïve triumph. "Yes—burglars! But don't speak so loud. It's supposed to be kept a great secret. I really oughtn't to tell you at all!"

"But what is there to tell?" I whispered with satisfactory impatience.

"You promise not to speak of it?"

"Of course!"

"Well, then, there are burglars in the neighbourhood."

"Have they committed any robberies?"

"Not yet."

"Then how do you know?"

"They've been seen. In the district. Two well-known London thieves!"

Two! I looked at Raffles. I had done so often during the evening, envying him his high spirits, his iron nerve, his buoyant wit, his perfect ease and his self-possession. But now I pitied him; through all my own terror and consternation, I pitied him as he sat eating and drinking, and laughing, and talking, without a cloud of fear or of embarrassment on his handsome, taking, dare-devil face. I caught up my champagne and emptied the glass.

"Who has seen them?" I then asked calmly.

"A detective. They were traced down from town a few days ago. They are believed to have designs on the Abbey!"

"But why aren't they run in?"

"Exactly what I asked papa on the way here this evening; he says there is no warrant out against the men at present, and all that can be done is to watch their movements."

"Oh! so they are being watched?"

"Yes, by a detective who is down here on purpose. And I heard Lord Amersteth tell papa that they had been seen this afternoon at Warbeck Junction."

The very place where Raffles and I had been caught in the rain! Our stampede from the inn was now explained; on the other hand, I was no longer to be taken by surprise by anything that my companion might have to tell me; and I succeeded in looking her in the face with a smile.

"This is really quite exciting, Miss Melhuish," said I. "May I ask how you come to know so much about it?"

"It's papa," was the confidential reply. "Lord Amersteth consulted him, and he consulted me. But for goodness' sake don't let it get about! I can't think what tempted me to tell you!"

"You may trust me, Miss Melhuish. But—aren't you frightened?"

Miss Melhuish giggled.

"Not a bit! They won't come to the rectory. There's nothing for them there. But look round the table; look at the diamonds. Look at old Lady Melrose's necklace alone!"

The Dowager Marchioness of Melrose was one of the few persons whom it had been unnecessary to point out to me. She sat on Lord Amersteth's right, flourishing her ear-trumpet, and drinking champagne with her usual notorious freedom, as dissipated and kindly a dame as the world has ever seen. It was a necklace of diamonds and sapphires that rose and fell about her ample neck.

"They say it's worth five thousand pounds at least," continued my companion. "Lady Margaret told me so this morning (that's Lady Margaret next your Mr. Raffles, you know); and the old dear will wear them every night. Think what a haul they would be! No; we don't feel in immediate danger at the rectory."

When the ladies rose, Miss Melhuish bound me to fresh vows of secrecy; and left me, I should think, with some remorse for her indiscretion, but more satisfaction at the importance which it had undoubtedly given her in my eyes. The opinion may smack of vanity, though, in reality, the very springs of conversation reside in that same human, universal itch to thrill the auditor. The peculiarity of Miss Melhuish was that she must be thrilling at all costs. And thrilling she had surely been.

I spare you my feelings of the next two hours. I tried hard to get a word with Raffles, but again and again I failed. In the dining-room he and Crowley lit their cigarettes with the same match, and had their heads together all the time. In the drawing-room I had the mortification of hearing him talk interminable nonsense into the trumpet-ear of Lady Melrose, whom he knew in town. Lastly, in the billiard-room, they had a great and lengthy pool, while I sat aloof and chafed more than ever in the company of a very serious Scotsman, who had arrived since dinner, and who would talk of nothing but the recent improvements in instantaneous photography. He had not come to play in the matches (he told me), but to obtain for Lord Amersteth such a series of cricket photographs as had never been taken before; whether as an amateur or a professional photographer I was unable to determine. I remember, however, seeking distraction in little bursts of resolute attention to the conversation of this bore. And so at last the long ordeal ended; glasses were emptied, men said good night, and I followed Raffles to his room.

"It's all up," I gasped, as he turned up the gas and I shut the door. "We're being watched. We've been followed down from town. There's a detective here on the spot!"

"How do you know?" asked Raffles, turning upon me quite sharply, but without the least dismay. And I told him how I knew.

"Of course," I added, "it was the fellow we saw in the inn this afternoon."

"The detective?" said Raffles. "Do you mean to say you don't know a detective when you see one, Bunny?"

"If that wasn't the fellow, which is?"

Raffles shook his head.

"To think that you've been talking to him for the last hour in the billiard-room, and couldn't spot what he was!"

"The Scotch photographer——"

I paused aghast.

"Scotch he is," said Raffles, "and photographer he may be. He is also Inspector Mackenzie of Scotland Yard—the very man I sent the message to that night last April. And you couldn't spot who he was in a whole hour! Oh, Bunny, Bunny, you were never built for crime!"

"But," said I, "if that was Mackenzie, who was the fellow you bolted from at Warbeck?"

"The man he's watching."

"But he's watching us!"

Raffles looked at me with a pitying eye, and shook his head again before handing me his open cigarette-case.

"I don't know whether smoking's forbidden in one's bedroom, but you'd better take one of these and stand tight, Bunny, because I'm going to say something offensive."

I helped myself with a laugh.

"Say what you like, my dear fellow, if it really isn't you and I that Mackenzie's after."

"Well, then, it isn't, and it couldn't be, and nobody but a born Bunny would suppose for a moment that it was! Do you seriously think he would sit there and knowingly watch his man playing pool under his nose? Well, he might; he's a cool hand, Mackenzie; but I'm not cool enough to win a pool under such conditions. At least, I don't think I am; it would be interesting to see. The situation wasn't free from strain as it was, though I knew he wasn't thinking of us. Crowley told me all about it after dinner, you see, and then I'd seen one of the men for myself this afternoon. You thought it was a detective who made me turn tail at that inn. I really don't know why I didn't tell you at the time, but it was just the opposite. That loud, red-faced brute is one of the cleverest thieves in London, and I once had a drink with him and our mutual fence. I was an East-ender from tongue to toe at the moment, but you will understand that I don't run unnecessary risks of recognition by a brute like that."

"He's not alone, I hear."

"By no means; there's at least one other man with him; and it's suggested that there may be an accomplice here in the house."

"Did Lord Crowley tell you so?"

"Crowley and the champagne between them. In confidence, of course, just as your girl told you; but even in confidence he never let on about Mackenzie. He told me there was a detective in the background, but that was all. Putting him up as a guest is evidently their big secret, to be kept from the other guests because it might offend them, but more particularly from the servants whom he's here to watch. That's my reading of the situation, Bunny, and you will agree with me that it's infinitely more interesting than we could have imagined it would prove."

"But infinitely more difficult for us," said I, with a sigh of pusillanimous relief. "Our hands are tied for this week, at all events."

"Not necessarily, my dear Bunny, though I admit that the chances are against us. Yet I'm not so sure of that either. There are all sorts of possibilities in these three-cornered combinations. Set A to watch B, and he won't have an eye left for C. That's the obvious theory, but then Mackenzie's a very big A. I should be sorry to have any boodle about me with that man in the house. Yet it would be great to nip in between A and B and score off them both at once! It would be worth a risk, Bunny, to do that; it would be worth risking something merely to take on old hands like B and his men at their own old game! Eh, Bunny? That would be something like a match. Gentlemen and Players at single wicket, by Jove!"

His eyes were brighter than I had known them for many a day. They shone with the perverted enthusiasm which was roused in him only by the contemplation of some new audacity. He kicked off his shoes and began pacing his room with noiseless rapidity; not since the night of the Old Bohemian dinner to Reuben Rosenthall had Raffles exhibited such excitement in my presence; and I was not sorry at the moment to be reminded of the fiasco to which that banquet had been the prelude.

"My dear A. J.," said I in his very own tone, "you're far too fond of the uphill game; you will eventually fall a victim of the sporting spirit and nothing else. Take a lesson from our last escape, and fly lower as you value our skins. Study the house as much as you like, but do—not—go and shove your head into Mackenzie's mouth!"

My wealth of metaphor brought him to a standstill, with his cigarette between his fingers and a grin beneath his shining eyes.

"You're quite right, Bunny. I won't. I really won't. Yet—you saw old Lady Melrose's necklace? I've been wanting it for years! But I'm not going to play the fool, honour bright, I'm not; yet—by Jove!—to get to windward of the professors and Mackenzie too! It would be a great game, Bunny, it would be a great game!"

"Well, you mustn't play it this week."

"No, no, I won't. But I wonder how the professors think of going to work? That's what one wants to know. I wonder if they've really got an accomplice in the house? How I wish I knew their game! But it's all right, Bunny; don't you be jealous; it shall be as you wish."

And with that assurance I went off to my own room and so to bed with an incredibly light heart. I had still enough of the honest man in me to welcome the postponement of our actual felonies, to dread their performance, and to deplore their necessity: which is merely another way of stating the too patent fact that I was an incomparably weaker man than Raffles, while every whit as wicked. I had, however, one rather strong point. I possessed the gift of dismissing unpleasant considerations, not intimately connected with the passing moment, entirely from my mind. Through the exercise of this faculty I had lately been living my frivolous life in town with as much ignoble enjoyment as I had derived from it the year before; and similarly, here at Milchester, in the long-dreaded cricket week, I had after all a quite excellent time.

It is true that there were other factors in this pleasing disappointment. In the first place, *mirabile dictu*, there were one or two even greater duffers than I on the Abbey cricket field. Indeed, quite early in the week, when it was of most value to me, I gained considerable kudos for a lucky catch; a ball, of which I had merely heard the hum, stuck fast in my hand, which Lord Amersteth himself grasped in public congratulation. This happy accident was not to be undone even by me, and, as nothing succeeds like success, and the constant encouragement of the one great cricketer on the field was in itself an immense stimulus, I actually made a run or two in my very next innings. Miss Melhuish said pretty things to me that night at the great ball in honour of Viscount Crowley's majority; she also told me that was the night on which the robbers would assuredly make their raid, and was full of arch tremors when we sat out in the garden, though the entire premises were illuminated all night long. Meanwhile the quiet Scotsman took countless photographs by day, which he developed by night in a dark room admirably situated in the servants' part of the house; and it is my firm belief that only two of his fellow-guests knew Mr. Clephane of Dundee for Inspector Mackenzie of Scotland Yard.

The week was to end with a trumpery match on the Saturday, which two or three of us intended abandoning early in order to return to town that night. The match, however, was never played. In the small hours of Saturday morning a tragedy took place at Milchester Abbey.

Let me tell of the thing as I saw and heard it. My room opened upon the central gallery, and was not even on the same floor as that on which Raffles—and I think all the other men—were quartered. I had been put, in fact, into the dressing-room of one of the grand suites, and my two near neighbours were old Lady Melrose and my host and hostess. Now, by the Friday evening the actual festivities were at an end, and, for the first time that week, I must have been sound asleep since midnight, when all at once I found myself sitting up breathless. A heavy thud had come against my door, and now I heard hard breathing and the dull stamp of muffled feet.

"I've got ye," muttered a voice. "It's no use struggling."

It was the Scotch detective, and a new fear turned me cold. There was no reply, but the hard breathing grew harder still, and the muffled feet beat the floor to a quicker measure. In sudden panic I sprang out of bed and flung open my door. A light burnt low on the landing, and by it I could see Mackenzie swaying and staggering in a silent tussle with some powerful adversary.

"Hold this man!" he cried, as I appeared. "Hold the rascal!"

But I stood like a fool until the pair of them backed into me, when, with a deep breath, I flung myself on the fellow, whose face I had seen at last. He was one of the footmen who waited at table; and no sooner had I pinned him than the detective loosed his hold.

"Hang on to him," he cried. "There's more of 'em below."

And he went leaping down the stairs, as other doors opened and Lord Amersteth and his son appeared simultaneously in their pyjamas. At that my man ceased struggling; but I was still holding him when Crowley turned up the gas.

"What the devil's all this?" asked Lord Amersteth, blinking. "Who was that ran downstairs?"

"MacClephane!" said I hastily.

"Aha!" said he, turning to the footman. "So you're the scoundrel, are you? Well done! Well done! Where was he caught?"

I had no idea.

"Here's Lady Melrose's door open," said Crowley. "Lady Melrose! Lady Melrose!"

"You forget she's deaf," said Lord Amersteth. "Ah! that'll be her maid."

An inner door had opened; next instant there was a little shriek, and a white figure gesticulated on the threshold.

"Oû donc est l'écrin de Madame la Marquise? La fenêtre est ouverte. Il a disparu!"

"Window open and jewel case gone, by Jove!" exclaimed Lord Amersteth. "Mais comment est Madame la Marquise? Est-elle bien?"

"Oui, milor. Elle dort."

"Sleeps through it all," said my lord. "She's the only one, then!"

"What made Mackenzie—Clephane—bolt?" young Crowley asked me.

"Said there were more of them below."

"Why the devil couldn't you tell us so before?" he cried, and went leaping downstairs in his turn.

He was followed by nearly all the cricketers, who now burst upon the scene in a body, only to desert it for the chase. Raffles was one of them, and I would gladly have been another, had not the footman chosen this moment to hurl me from him, and to make a dash in the direction from which they had come. Lord Amersteth had him in an instant; but the fellow fought desperately, and it took the two of us to drag him downstairs, amid a terrified chorus from half-open doors. Eventually we handed him over to two other footmen who appeared with their nightshirts tucked into their trousers, and my host was good enough to compliment me as he led the way outside.

"I thought I heard a shot," he added. "Didn't you?"

"I thought I heard three."

And out we dashed into the darkness.

I remember how the gravel pricked my feet, how the wet grass numbed them as we made for the sound of voices on an outlying lawn. So dark was the night that we were in the cricketers' midst before we saw the shimmer of their pyjamas, and then Lord Amersteth almost trod on Mackenzie as he lay prostrate in the dew.

"Who's this?" he cried. "What on earth's happened?"

"It's Clephane," said a man who knelt over him. "He's got a bullet in him somewhere."

"Is he alive?"

"Barely."

"Good god! Where's Crowley?"

"Here I am," called a breathless voice. "It's no good, you fellows. There's nothing to show which way they've gone. Here's Raffles; he's chucked it, too." And they ran up panting.

"Well, we've got one of them, at all events," muttered Lord Amersteth. "The next thing is to get this poor fellow indoors. Take his shoulders somebody. Now his middle. Join hands under him. Altogether now; that's the way. Poor fellow! Poor fellow! His name isn't Clephane at all. He's a Scotland Yard detective, down here for these very villains!"

Raffles was the first to express surprise; but he had also been the first to raise the wounded man. Nor had any of them a stronger or more tender hand in the slow procession to the house. In a little we had the senseless man stretched on a sofa in the library. And there, with ice on his wound and brandy in his throat, his eyes opened and his lips moved.

Lord Amersteth bent down to catch the words.

"Yes, yes," said he; "we've got one of them safe and sound. The brute you collared upstairs." Lord Amersteth bent lower. "By Jove! Lowered the jewel-case out of the window, did he? And they've got clean away with it! Well, well! I only hope we'll be able to pull this good fellow through. He's off again."

An hour passed; the sun was rising.

It found a dozen young fellows on the settees in the billiard-room, drinking whisky and soda-water in their overcoats and pyjamas, and still talking excitedly in one breath. A time-table was being passed from hand to hand: the doctor was still in the library. At last the door opened, and Lord Amersteth put in his head.

"It isn't hopeless," said he, "but it's bad enough. There'll be no cricket to-day."

Another hour, and most of us were on our way to catch the early train; between us we filled a compartment almost to suffocation. And still we talked all together of the night's event; and still I was a little hero in my way, for having kept my hold of the one ruffian who had been taken; and my gratification was subtle and intense. Raffles watched me under lowered lids. Not a word had we had together; not a word did we have until we had left the others at Paddington, and were skimming through the streets in a hansom with noiseless tyres and a tinkling bell.

"Well, Bunny," said Raffles, "so the professors have it, eh?"

"Yes," said I. "And I'm jolly glad!"

"That poor Mackenzie has a ball in his chest?"

"That you and I have been on the decent side for once."

He shrugged his shoulders.

"You're hopeless, Bunny, quite hopeless! I take it you wouldn't have refused your share if the boodle had fallen to us? Yet you positively enjoy coming off second best—for the second time running! I confess, however, that the professors' methods were full of interest to me. I, for one, have probably gained as much in experience as I have lost in other things. That lowering the jewel-case out of the window was a very simple and effective expedient; two of them had been waiting below for it for hours."

"How do you know?" I asked.

"I saw them from my own window, which was just above the dear old lady's. I was fretting for that necklace in particular, when I went up to turn in for our last night—and I happened to look out of the window. In point of fact, I wanted to see whether the one below was open, and whether there was the slightest chance of working the oracle with my sheet for a rope. Of course I took the precaution of turning my light off first, and it was a lucky thing I did. I saw the pros. right down below, and they never saw me. I saw a little tiny luminous disc just for an instant, and then again for an instant a few minutes later. Of course I knew what it was, for I have my own watch-dial daubed with luminous paint; it makes a lantern of sorts when you can get no better. But these fellows were not using theirs as a lantern. They were under the old lady's window. They were watching the time. The whole thing was arranged with their accomplice inside. Set a thief to catch a thief: in a minute I had guessed what the whole thing proved to be."

"And you did nothing!" I exclaimed.

"On the contrary, I went downstairs and straight into Lady Melrose's room——"

"You did?"

"Without a moment's hesitation. To save her jewels. And I was prepared to yell as much into her ear-trumpet for all the house to hear. But the dear lady is too deaf and too fond of her dinner to wake easily."

"Well?"

"She didn't stir."

"And yet you allowed the professors, as you call them, to take her jewels, case and all!"

"All but this," said Raffles, thrusting his fist into my lap. "I would have shown it you before, but really, old fellow, your face all day has been worth a fortune to the firm!"

And he opened his fist, to shut it next instant on the bunch of diamonds and of sapphires that I had last seen encircling the neck of Lady Melrose.

H. G. WELLS

(1866–   )

HERBERT GEORGE WELLS was educated at Midhurst Grammar School, whence he proceeded to the Royal College of Science, where he graduated with first-class honours in Zoology. He soon turned his attention to writing, and an early book, *The Time Machine* (1895), quickly brought him recognition. *The Invisible Man* (1897) and the pseudo-scientific romance, *The War of the Worlds* (1898), established him as a writer with whom to reckon. A stream of novels, short stories, and sociological studies has issued steadily from his pen, and if the trend of his imagination has bent more and more to the examination of social and political problems and the presentation of them in the guise of fiction, the vividness with which he presents his thesis absolves it from any charge of academic detachment. Of his later works the most notable are *The War in the Air* (1908), *Tono-Bungay* (1909), *The History of Mr. Polly* (1910), *The New Machiavelli* (1910), and his study of the Home Front during the European War, *Mr. Britling Sees It Through* (1916). His *Outline of History* (1920) was a courageous attempt to present history in a new manner and from a new angle.

"The Stolen Bacillus," from *The Stolen Bacillus and Other Incidents* (1895), is reprinted by kind permission of the author.

THE STOLEN BACILLUS

"THIS again," said the Bacteriologist, slipping a glass slide under the microscope, "is a preparation of the celebrated Bacillus of cholera—the cholera germ."

The pale-faced man peered down the microscope. He was evidently not accustomed to that kind of thing, and held a limp white hand over his disengaged eye. "I see very little," he said.

"Touch this screw," said the Bacteriologist; "perhaps the microscope is out of focus for you. Eyes vary so much. Just the fraction of a turn this way or that."

"Ah! now I see," said the visitor. "Not so very much to see after all. Little streaks and shreds of pink. And yet those little particles, those mere atomies, might multiply and devastate a city! Wonderful!"

He stood up, and releasing the glass slip from the microscope, held it in his hand towards the window. "Scarcely visible," he said, scrutinising the preparation. He hesitated. "Are these—alive? Are they dangerous now?"

"Those have been stained and killed," said the Bacteriologist. "I wish, for my own part, we could kill and stain every one of them in the universe."

"I suppose," the pale man said with a slight smile, "that you scarcely care to have such things about you in the living—in the active state?"

"On the contrary, we are obliged to," said the Bacteriologist. "Here, for instance——" He walked across the room and took up one of several sealed tubes. "Here is the living thing. This is a cultivation of the actual living disease bacteria." He hesitated. "Bottled cholera, so to speak."

A slight gleam of satisfaction appeared momentarily in the face of the pale man. "It's a deadly thing to have in your possession," he said, devouring the little tube with his eyes. The Bacteriologist watched the morbid pleasure in his visitor's expression. This man, who had visited him that afternoon with a note of introduction from an old friend, interested him from the very contrast of their dispositions. The lank black hair and deep grey eyes, the haggard expression and nervous manner, the fitful yet keen interest of his visitor were a novel change from the phlegmatic deliberations of the ordinary scientific worker with whom the Bacteriologist chiefly associated. It was perhaps natural, with a hearer evidently so impressionable to the lethal nature of his topic, to take the most effective aspect of the matter.

He held the tube in his hand thoughtfully. "Yes, here is the pestilence imprisoned. Only break such a little tube as this into a supply of drinking-water, say to these minute particles of life that one must needs stain and examine with the highest powers of the microscope even to see, and that one can neither smell nor taste—say to them, 'Go forth, increase and multiply, and replenish the cisterns,' and Death—mysterious, untraceable Death, Death swift and terrible, Death full of pain and indignity—would be released upon this city, and go hither and thither seeking his victims. Here he would take the husband from the wife, here the child from its mother, here the statesman from his duty, and here the toiler from his trouble. He would follow the water-mains, creeping along streets, picking out and punishing a house here and a house there where they did not boil their drinking-water, creeping into the wells of the mineral-water makers, getting washed into salad, and lying dormant in ices. He would wait ready to be drunk in the horse-troughs, and by unwary children in the public fountains. He would soak into the soil, to reappear in springs and wells at a thousand unexpected places. Once start him at the water-supply, and before we could ring him in and catch him again he would have decimated the metropolis."

He stopped abruptly. He had been told rhetoric was his weakness.

"But he is quite safe here, you know—quite safe."

The pale-faced man nodded. His eyes shone. He cleared his throat.

"These Anarchist—rascals," said he, "are fools, blind fools—to use bombs when this kind of thing is attainable. I think——"

A gentle rap, a mere light touch of the finger-nails was heard at the door. The Bacteriologist opened it. "Just a minute, dear," whispered his wife.

When he re-entered the laboratory his visitor was looking at his watch. "I had no idea I had wasted an hour of your time," he said. "Twelve minutes to four. I ought to have left here by half-past three. But your things were really too interesting. No, positively, I cannot stop a moment longer. I have an engagement at four."

He passed out of the room reiterating his thanks, and the Bacteriologist accompanied him to the door, and then returned thoughtfully along the passage to his laboratory. He was musing on the ethnology of his visitor. Certainly the man was not a Teutonic type nor a common Latin one. "A morbid product, anyhow, I am afraid," said the Bacteriologist to himself. "How he gloated on those cultivations of disease-germs!" A disturbing thought struck him. He turned to the bench by the vapour-bath, and then very quickly to his writing-table. Then he felt hastily in his pockets, and then he rushed to the door. "I may have put it down on the hall table," he said.

"Minnie!" he shouted hoarsely in the hall.

"Yes, dear," came a remote voice.

"Had I anything in my hand when I spoke to you, just now?"

Pause.

"Nothing, dear, because I remember——"

"Blue ruin!" cried the Bacteriologist, and incontinently ran to the front door and down the steps of his house to the street.

Minnie, hearing the door slam violently, ran in alarm to the window. Down the street a slender man was getting into a cab. The Bacteriologist, hatless, and in his carpet slippers, was running and gesticulating wildly towards this group. One slipper came off, but he did not wait for it. "He has gone *mad!*" said Minnie; "it's that horrid science of his"; and, opening the window, would have called after him. The slender man, suddenly glancing round, seemed struck with the same idea of mental disorder. He pointed hastily to the Bacteriologist, said something to the cabman, the apron of the cab slammed, the whip swished, the horse's feet clattered, and in a moment cab, and Bacteriologist hotly in pursuit, had receded up the vista of the roadway and disappeared round the corner.

Minnie remained straining out of the window for a minute. Then she drew her head back into the room again. She was dumbfounded. "Of course he is eccentric," she meditated. "But running about London—in the height of the season, too—in his socks!" A happy thought struck her. She hastily put her bonnet on, seized his shoes, went into the hall, took down his hat and light overcoat from the pegs, emerged upon the doorstep, and hailed a cab that opportunely crawled by. "Drive me up the road and round Havelock Crescent, and see if we can find a gentleman running about in a velveteen coat and no hat."

"Velveteen coat, ma'am, and no 'at. Very good, ma'am." And the cabman whipped up at once in the most matter-of-fact way, as if he drove to this address every day in his life.

Some few minutes later the little group of cabmen and loafers that collects round the cabmen's shelter at Haverstock Hill were startled by the passing of a cab with a ginger-coloured screw of a horse, driven furiously.

They were silent as it went by, and then as it receded, "That's 'Arry 'Icks. Wot's *he* got?" said the stout gentleman known as Old Tootles.

"He's a-using his whip, he is, *to* rights," said the ostler boy.

"Hullo!" said poor old Tommy Byles; "here's another bloomin' loonattic. Blowed if there ain't."

"It's old George," said Old Tootles, "and he's drivin' a loonattic, as you say. Ain't he a-clawin' out of the keb? Wonder if he's after 'Arry 'Icks?"

The group round the cabmen's shelter became animated. Chorus: "Go it, George!" "It's a race." "You'll ketch 'em!" "Whip up!"

"She's a goer, she is!" said the ostler boy.

"Strike me giddy!" cried Old Tootles. "Here! *I'm* a-goin' to begin in a minute. Here's another comin'. If all the kebs in Hampstead ain't gone mad this morning!"

"It's a fieldmale this time," said the ostler boy.

"She's a followin' *him*," said Old Tootles. "Usually the other way about."

"What's she got in her 'and?"

"Looks like a 'igh 'at."

"What a bloomin' lark it is! Three to one on old George," said the ostler boy. "Nexst!"

Minnie went by in a perfect roar of applause. She did not like it, but she felt that she was doing her duty, and whirled on down Haverstock Hill and Camden Town High Street, with her eyes ever intent on the animated back view of old George, who was driving her vagrant husband so incomprehensibly away from her.

The man in the foremost cab sat crouched in the corner, his arms tightly folded, and the little tube that contained such vast possibilities of destruction gripped in his hand. His mood was a singular mixture of fear and exultation. Chiefly he was afraid of being caught before he could accomplish his purpose but behind this was a vaguer but larger fear of the awfulness of his crime. But his exultation far exceeded his fear. No Anarchist before him had ever approached this conception of his. Ravachol, Vaillant, all those distinguished persons whose fame he had envied, dwindled into insignificance beside him. He had only to make sure of the water-supply, and break the little tube into a reservoir. How brilliantly he had planned it, forged the letter of introduction and got into the laboratory, and how brilliantly he had seized his opportunity! The world should hear of him at last. All those people who had sneered at him, neglected him, preferred other people to him, found his company undesirable, should consider him at last. Death, death, death! They had always treated him as a man of no importance. All the world had been in a conspiracy to keep him under. He would teach them yet what it is to isolate a man. What was this familiar street? Great Saint Andrew's Street, of course! How fared the chase? He craned out of the cab. The Bacteriologist was scarcely fifty yards behind. That was bad. He would be caught and stopped yet. He felt in his pocket for money, and found half-a-sovereign. This he thrust up through the trap in the top of the cab into the man's face. "More," he shouted, "if only we get away."

The money was snatched out of his hand. "Right you are," said the cabman, and the trap slammed, and the lash lay along the glistening side of the horse. The cab swayed, and the Anarchist, half-standing under the trap, put the hand containing the little glass tube upon the apron to preserve his balance. He felt the brittle thing crack, and the broken half of it rang upon the floor of the cab. He fell back into the seat with a curse, and stared dismally at the two or three drops of moisture on the apron.

He shuddered.

"Well! I suppose I shall be the first. *Phew!* Anyhow, I shall be a Martyr. That's something. But it is a filthy death, nevertheless. I wonder if it hurts as much as they say."

Presently a thought occurred to him—he groped between his feet. A little drop was still in the broken end of the tube, and he drank this to make sure. It was better to make sure. At any rate, he would not fail.

Then it dawned upon him that there was no further need to escape the Bacteriologist. In Wellington Street he told the cabman to stop, and got out. He slipped on the step, and his head felt queer. It was rapid stuff, this cholera poison. He waved his cabman out of existence, so to speak, and stood on the pavement with his arms folded upon his breast awaiting the arrival of the Bacteriologist. There was something tragic in his pose. The sense of imminent death gave him a certain dignity. He greeted his pursuer with a defiant laugh.

"*Vive l'Anarchie!* You are too late, my friend. I have drunk it. The cholera is abroad."

The Bacteriologist from his cab beamed curiously at him through his spectacles. "You have drunk it! An Anarchist! I see now." He was about to say something more, and then checked himself. A smile hung in the corner of his mouth. He opened the apron of his cab as if to descend, at which the Anarchist waved him a dramatic farewell and strode off towards Waterloo Bridge, carefully jostling his infected body against as many people as possible. The Bacteriologist was so occupied with the vision of him that he scarcely manifested the slightest surprise at the appearance of Minnie upon the pavement with his hat and shoes and overcoat. "Very good of you to bring my things," he said, and remained lost in contemplation of the receding figure of the Anarchist.

"You had better get in," he said, still staring. Minnie felt absolutely convinced now that he was mad, and directed the cabman home on her own responsibility. "Put on my shoes? Certainly, dear," said he, as the cab began to turn, and hid the strutting black figure, now small in the distance, from his eyes. Then suddenly something grotesque struck him, and he laughed. Then he remarked, "It is really very serious, though.

"You see, that man came to my house to see me, and he is an Anarchist. No—don't faint, or I cannot possibly tell you the rest. And I wanted to astonish him, not knowing he was an Anarchist, and I took up a cultivation of that new species of Bacterium I was telling you of, that infest, and I think cause, the blue patches upon various monkeys; and, like a fool, I said it was Asiatic cholera. And he ran away with it to poison the water of London, and he certainly might have made things look blue for this civilised city. And now he has swallowed it. Of course I cannot say what will happen, but you know it turned that kitten blue, and the three puppies—in patches, and the sparrow—bright blue. But the bother is I shall have all the trouble and expense of preparing some more.

"Put on my coat on this hot day! Why? Because we might meet Mrs. Jabber. My dear, Mrs. Jabber is not a draught. But why should I wear a coat on a hot day because of Mrs.—— Oh, *very* well."

ARNOLD BENNETT

(1867–)

ENOCH ARNOLD BENNETT studied law, but abandoned that profession in 1893, when he became, first, assistant editor, and, later, editor of a weekly paper. In 1900 he resigned his post, and has since devoted himself exclusively to literature. In the very front rank of popular authors, he has written on many subjects, but he is best known as the novelist of the Potteries. Among his best-known books are *Anna of the Five Towns* (1902), *Buried Alive* (1908), *The Old Wives' Tale* (1908), *Clayhanger* (1910), *The Card* (1911), *Hilda Lessways* (1911), and *Lord Raingo* (1926). He is also the author of several successful plays.

"The Lion's Share," from *The Grim Smile of the Five Towns* (1907), is reprinted by kind permission of the author.

THE LION'S SHARE

IN the Five Towns the following history is related by those who know it as something side-splittingly funny—as one of the best jokes that ever occurred in a district devoted to jokes. And I, too, have hitherto regarded it as such. But upon my soul, now that I come to write it down, it strikes me as being, after all, a pretty grim tragedy. However, you shall judge, and laugh or cry as you please.

It began in the little house of Mrs. Carpole, up at Bleakridge, on the hill between Bursley and Hanbridge. Mrs. Carpole was the second Mrs. Carpole, and her husband was dead. She had a stepson, Horace, and a son of her own, Sidney. Horace is the hero, or the villain, of the history. On the day when the unfortunate affair began he was nineteen years old, and a model youth. Not only was he getting on in business, not only did he give half his evenings to the study of the chemistry of pottery and the other half to various secretaryships in connection with the Wesleyan Methodist Chapel and Sunday-school, not only did he save money, not only was he a comfort to his stepmother and a sort of uncle to Sidney, not only was he an early riser, a total abstainer, a non-smoker, and a good listener; but, in addition to the practice of these manifold and rare virtues, he found time, even at that tender age, to pay his tailor's bill promptly and to fold his trousers in the same crease every night—so that he always looked neat and dignified. Strange to say, he made no friends. Perhaps he was just a thought too perfect for a district like the Five Towns; a sin or so might have endeared him to the entire neighbourhood. Perhaps his loneliness was due to his imperfect sense of humour, or perhaps to the dull, unsmiling heaviness of his somewhat flat features.

Sidney was quite a different story. Sidney, to use his mother's phrase, was a little jockey. His years were then eight. Fair-haired and blue-eyed, as most little jockeys are, he had a smile and a scowl that were equally effective in tyrannising over both his mother and Horace, and he was beloved by everybody. Women turned to look at him in the street. Unhappily, his health was not good. He was afflicted by a slight deafness, which, however, the doctor said he would grow out of; the doctor predicted for him a lusty manhood. In the meantime, he caught every disease that happened to be about, and nearly died of each one. His latest acquisition had been scarlet fever. Now one afternoon, after he had "peeled" and his room had been disinfected, and he was beginning to walk again, Horace came home and decided that Sidney should be brought downstairs for tea as a treat, to celebrate his convalescence, and that he, Horace, would carry him downstairs. Mrs. Carpole was delighted with the idea, and Sidney also, except that Sidney did not want to be carried downstairs—he wanted to walk down.

"I think it will be better for him to walk, Horace dear," said Mrs. Carpole, in her thin, plaintive voice. "He can, quite well. And you know how clumsy you are. Supposing you were to fall!"

Horace, nevertheless, in pursuance of his programme of being uncle to Sidney, was determined to carry Sidney. And carry Sidney he did, despite warnings and kickings. At least he carried him as far as the turn in the steep stairs, at which point he fell, just as his stepmother had feared, and Sidney with him. The half-brothers arrived on the ground floor in company, but Horace, with his eleven stone two, was on top, and the poor suffering little convalescent lay moveless and insensible.

It took the doctor forty minutes to bring him to, and all the time the odour of grilled herrings, which formed part of the uneaten tea, made itself felt through the house like a Satanic comment on the spectacle of human life. The scene was dreadful at first. The agony then passed. There were no bruises on the boy, not a mark, and in a couple of hours he seemed to be perfectly himself. Horace breathed again, and thanked Heaven it was no worse. His gratitude to Heaven was, however, slightly premature, for in the black middle of the night poor Sidney was seized with excruciating pains in the head, and the doctor lost four hours' sleep. These pains returned at intervals of a few days, and naturally the child's convalescence was retarded. Then Horace said that Mrs. Carpole should take Sidney to Buxton for a fortnight, and he paid all the expenses of the trip out of his savings. He was desolated, utterly stricken; he said he should never forgive himself. Sidney improved, slowly.

II

After several months, during which Horace had given up all his limited spare time to the superintendence of the child's first steps in knowledge, Sidney was judged to be sufficiently strong to go to school, and it was arranged that he should attend the Endowed School at the Wedgwood Institution. Horace accompanied him thither on the opening day of the term—it was an inclement morning in January—and left the young delicate sprig, apparently joyous and content, to the care of his masters and the mercy of his companions. But Sidney came home for dinner weeping—weeping in spite of his new mortar-board cap, his new satchel, his new box of compasses and his new books. His mother kept him at home in the afternoon, and by the evening another of those terrible attacks had supervened. The doctor and Horace and Mrs. Carpole once more lost much precious sleep. The mysterious malady continued. School was out of the question.

And when Sidney took the air, in charge of his mother, everybody stopped to sympathise with him and to stroke his curls and call him a poor dear, and also to commiserate Mrs. Carpole. As for Horace, Bursley tried to feel sorry for Horace, but it only succeeded in showing Horace that it was hiding a sentiment of indignation against him. Each friendly face as it passed Horace in the street said, without words, "There goes the youth who probably ruined his young stepbrother's life. And through sheer obstinacy, too! He dropped the little darling in spite of warnings and protests, and then fell on the top of him. Of course, he didn't do it on purpose, but——"

The doctor mentioned Greatorex of Manchester, the celebrated brain specialist. And Horace took Sidney to Manchester. They had to wait an hour and a quarter to see Greatorex, his well-known consulting-rooms in John Dalton Street being crowded with imperfect brains; but their turn came at last, and they found themselves in Greatorex's presence. Greatorex was a fat man, with the voice of a thin man, who seemed to spend the whole of his career in the care of his finger-nails.

"Well, my little fellow," said Greatorex, "don't cry." (For Sidney was already crying.) And then to Horace, in a curt tone: "What is it?"

And Horace was obliged to humiliate himself and relate the accident in detail, together with all that had subsequently happened.

"Yes, yes, yes, yes!" Greatorex would punctuate the recital, and when tired of "yes" he would say, "Hum, hum, hum, hum!"

When he had said "hum" seventy-two times he suddenly remarked that his fee was three guineas, and told Horace to strengthen Sidney all he could, not to work him too hard, and to bring him back in a year's time.

Horace paid the money, Greatorex emitted a final "hum," and then the stepbrothers were whisked out by an expeditious footman. The experience cost Horace over four pounds and the loss of a day's time. And the worst was that Sidney had a violent attack that very night.

School being impossible for him, Sidney had intermittent instruction from professors of both sexes at home. But he learnt practically nothing except the banjo. Horace had to buy him a banjo; it cost the best part of a ten-pound note; still, Horace could do no less. Sidney's stature grew rapidly; his general health certainly improved, yet not completely; he always had a fragile, interesting air. Moreover, his deafness did not disappear: there were occasions when it was extremely pronounced. And he was never quite safe from those attacks in the head. He spent a month or six weeks each year in the expensive bracing atmosphere of some seaside resort, and altogether he was decidedly a heavy drain on Horace's resources. People were aware of this, and they said that Horace ought to be happy that he was *in a position* to spend money freely on his poor brother. Had not the doctor predicted, before the catastrophe due to Horace's culpable negligence, that Sidney would grow into a strong man, and that his deafness would leave him? The truth was, one never knew the end of those accidents in infancy! Further, was not Sidney's sad condition slowly killing his mother? It was whispered about that, since the disaster, Sidney had not been *quite* sound mentally. Was not the mere suspicion of this enough to kill any mother?

And, as a fact, Mrs. Carpole did die. She died of a quinsy, doubtless aggravated by Sidney's sad condition.

Not long afterwards Horace came into a small fortune from his maternal grandfather. But poor Sidney did not come into any fortune, and people somehow illogically inferred that Horace had not behaved quite nicely in coming into a fortune while his suffering invalid brother, whom he had so deeply harmed, came into nothing. Even Horace had compunctions due to the visitations of a similar idea. And with part of the fortune he bought a house with a large garden up at Toft End, the highest hill of the hilly Five Towns, so that Sidney might have the benefit of the air. He also engaged a housekeeper and servants. With the remainder of the fortune he obtained a partnership in the firm of earthenware manufacturers for whom he had been acting as highly-paid manager.

Sidney reached the age of eighteen, and was most effective to look upon, his bright hair being still curly, and his eyes a wondrous blue, and his form elegant; and the question of Sidney's future arose. His health was steadily on the up grade. The deafness had quite disappeared. He had inclinations towards art, and had already amused himself by painting some beautiful vases. So it was settled that he should enter Horace's works on the art side, with a view to becoming, ultimately, art director. Horace gave him three pounds a week, in order that he might feel perfectly independent, and, to the same end, Sidney paid Horace seven-and-sixpence a week for board and lodging. But the change of life upset the youth's health again. After only two visits to the works he had a grave recurrence of the head-attacks, and he was solemnly exhorted not to apply himself too closely to business. He therefore took several half-holidays a week, and sometimes a whole one. And even when he put in one of his full days he would arrive at the works three hours after Horace, and restore the balance by leaving an hour earlier. The entire town watched over him as a mother watches over a son. The notion that he was not *quite* right in the pate gradually died away, and everybody was thankful for that, though it was feared an untimely grave might be his portion.

III

SHE was a nice girl: the nicest girl that Horace had ever met with, because her charming niceness included a faculty of being really serious about serious things—and yet she could be deliciously gay. In short, she was a revelation to Horace. And her name was Ella, and she had come one year to spend some weeks with Mrs. Penkethman, the widowed headmistress of the Wesleyan Day School, who was her cousin. Mrs. Penkethman and Ella had been holidaying together in France; their arrival in Bursley naturally coincided with the reopening of the school in August for the autumn term.

Now at this period Horace was rather lonely in his large house and garden; for Sidney, in pursuit of health, had gone off on a six weeks' cruise round Holland, Finland, Norway, and Sweden, in one of those Atlantic liners which, translated like Enoch without dying, become in their old age "steam-yachts," with fine names apt to lead to confusion with the private yacht of the Tsar of Russia. Horace had offered him the trip, and Horace was also paying his weekly salary as usual.

So Horace, who had always been friendly with Mrs. Penkethman, grew now more than ever friendly with Mrs. Penkethman. And Mrs. Penkethman and Ella were inseparable. The few aristocrats left in Bursley in September remarked that Horace knew what he was about, as it was notorious that Ella had the most solid expectations. But as a matter of fact Horace did not know what he was about, and he never once thought of Ella's expectations. He was simply, as they say in Bursley, knocked silly by Ella. He honestly imagined her to be the wonderfullest woman on the earth's surface, with her dark eyes and her expressive sympathetic gestures, and her alternations of seriousness and gaiety. It astounded him that a girl of twenty-one could have thought so deeply upon life as she had. The inexplicable thing was that she looked up to *him*. She evidently admired *him*. He wanted to tell her that she was quite wrong about him, much too kind in her estimate of him—that really he was a very ordinary man indeed. But another instinct prevented him from thus undeceiving her.

And one Saturday afternoon, the season being late September, Horace actually got those two women up to tea in his house and garden. He had not dared to dream of such bliss. He had hesitated long before asking them to come, and in asking them he had blushed and stammered: the invitation had seemed to him to savour of audacity. But, bless you! they had accepted with apparent ecstasy. They gave him to think that they had genuinely wanted to come. And they came extra-specially dressed—visions, lilies of the field. And as the day was quite warm, tea was served in the garden, and everybody admired the view; and there was no restraint, no awkwardness. In particular Ella talked with an ease and a distinction that enchanted Horace, and almost made him talk with ease and distinction too. He said to himself that, seeing he had only known her a month, he was getting on amazingly. He said to himself that his good luck passed belief.

Then there was a sound of cab-wheels on the other side of the garden-wall, and presently Horace heard the housekeeper complimenting Sidney on his good looks, and Sidney asking the housekeeper to lend him three shillings to pay the cabman. The golden youth had returned without the slightest warning from his cruise. The tea trio, at the lower end of the garden, saw him standing in the porch, tanned, curly, graceful, and young. Horace half rose, and then sat down again. Ella stared hard.

"That must be your brother," she said.

"Yes, that's Sid," Horace answered; and then, calling out loudly: "Come down here, Sid, and tell them to bring another cup and saucer."

"Right you are, old man," Sidney shouted. "You see I'm back. What! Mrs. Penkethman, is that you?" He came down the central path of the garden like a Narcissus.

"He *does* look delicate," said Ella under her breath to Horace. Tears came to her eyes.

Naturally Ella knew all about Sidney. She enjoyed the entire confidence of Mrs. Penkethman, and what Mrs. Penkethman didn't know of the private history of the upper classes in Bursley did not amount to very much.

These were nearly the last words that Ella spoke to Horace that afternoon. The introduction was made, and Sidney slipped into the party as comfortably as he slipped into everything, like a candle slipping into a socket. But nevertheless Ella talked no more. She just stared at Sidney, and listened to him. Horace was proud that Sidney had made such an impression on her; he was glad that she showed no aversion to Sidney, because, in the event of Horace's marriage, where would Sidney live, if not with Horace and Horace's wife? Still, he could have wished that Ella would continue to display her conversational powers.

Presently, Sidney lighted a cigarette. He was of those young men whose delicate mouths seem to have been fashioned for the nice conduct of a cigarette. And he had a way of blowing out the smoke that secretly ravished every feminine beholder. Horace still held to his boyhood's principles; but he envied Sidney a little.

At the conclusion of the festivity these two women naturally could not be permitted to walk home alone. And, naturally, also, the four could not walk abreast on the narrow pavements. Horace went first with Mrs. Penkethman. He was mad with anxiety to appropriate Ella, but he dared not. It would not have been quite correct; it would have been, as they say in Bursley, too thick. Besides, there was the question of age. Horace was over thirty, and Mrs. Penkethman was also—over thirty; whereas Sidney was twenty-one, and so was Ella. Hence Sidney walked behind with Ella, and the procession started in silence. Horace did not look round too often—that would not have been quite proper—but whenever he did look round the other couple had lagged farther and farther behind, and Ella seemed perfectly to have recovered her speech. At length he looked round, and lo! they had not turned the last corner; and they arrived at Mrs. Penkethman's cottage at Hillport a quarter of an hour after their elders.

IV

The wedding cost Horace a large sum of money. You see, he could not do less than behave handsomely by the bride, owing to his notorious admiration for her; and of course the bridegroom needed setting up. Horace practically furnished their home for them out of his own pocket; it was not to be expected that Sidney should have resources. Further, Sidney as a single man, paying seven-and-six a week for board and lodging, could no doubt struggle along upon three pounds weekly. But Sidney as a husband, with the nicest girl in the world to take care of, and house-rent to pay, could not possibly perform the same feat. Although he did no more work at the manufactory—Horace could not have been so unbrotherly as to demand it—Horace paid him eight pounds a week instead of three.

And the affair cost Horace a good deal besides money. But what could Horace do? He decidedly would not have wished to wreck the happiness of two young and beautiful lives, even had he possessed the power to do so. And he did not possess the power. Those two did not consult Horace before falling in love. They merely fell in love, and there was the end of it—and an end of Horace too! Horace had to suffer. He did suffer.

Perhaps it was for his highest welfare that other matters came to monopolise his mind. One sorrow drives out another. If you sit on a pin you are apt to forget that you have the toothache. The earthenware manufactory was not going well. Plenty of business was being done, but not at the right prices. Crushed between the upper and nether millstones of the McKinley Tariff and German competition, Horace, in company with other manufacturers, was breathing out his life's blood in the shape of capital. The truth was that he had never had enough capital. He had heavily mortgaged the house at Toft End in order to purchase his partners' shares in the business and have the whole undertaking to himself, and he profoundly regretted it. He needed every penny that he could collect; the strictest economy was necessary if he meant to survive the struggle. And here he was paying eight pounds a week to a personage purely ornamental, after having squandered hundreds in rendering that personage comfortable! The situation was dreadful.

You may ask, Why did he not explain the situation to Sidney? Well, partly because he was too kind, and partly because he was too proud, and partly because Sidney would not have understood. Horace fought on, keeping up a position in the town and hoping that miracles would occur.

Then Ella's expectations were realised. Sidney and she had some twenty thousand pounds to play with. And they played the most agreeable games. But not in Bursley. No. They left Horace in Bursley and went to Llandudno for a spell. Horace envied them, but he saw them off at the station as an elder brother should, and tipped the porters.

Certainly he was relieved of the formality of paying eight pounds a week to his brother. But this did not help him much. The sad fact was that "things" (by which is meant fate, circumstances, credit, and so on) had gone too far. It was no longer a question of eight pounds a week; it was a question of final ruin.

Surely he might have borrowed money from Sidney? Sidney had no money; the money was Ella's, and Horace could not have brought himself to borrow money from a woman—from Ella, from a heavenly creature who always had a soothing sympathetic word for him. That would have been to take advantage of Ella. No, if you suggest such a thing, you do not know Horace.

I stated in the beginning that he had no faults. He was therefore absolutely honest. And he called his creditors together while he could yet pay them twenty shillings in the pound. It was a noble act, rare enough in the Five Towns and in other parts of England. But he received no praise for it. He had only done what every man in his position ought to do. If Horace had failed for ten times the sum that his debts actually did amount to, and then paid two shillings in the pound instead of twenty, he would have made a stir in the world and been looked up to as no ordinary man of business.

Having settled his affairs in this humdrum, idiotic manner, Horace took a third-class return to Llandudno. Sidney and Ella were staying at the hydro with the strange Welsh name, and he found Sidney lolling on the sunshiny beach in front of the hydro discoursing on the banjo to himself. When asked where his wife was, Sidney replied that she was lying down, and was obliged to rest as much as possible.

Horace, ashamed to trouble this domestic idyl, related his misfortunes as airily as he could.

And Sidney said he was awfully sorry, and had no notion how matters stood, and could he do anything for Horace? If so, Horace might——

"No," said Horace. "I'm all right. I've very fortunately got an excellent place as manager in a big new manufactory in Germany." (This is how we deal with German competition in the Five Towns.)

"Germany?" cried Sidney.

"Yes," said Horace; "and I start the day after to-morrow."

"Well," said Sidney, "at any rate you'll stay the night."

"Thanks," said Horace, "you're very kind. I will."

So they went into the hydro together, Sidney caressing his wonderful new pearl-inlaid banjo; and Horace talked in low tones to Ella as she lay on the sofa. He convinced Ella that his departure to Germany was the one thing he had desired all his life, because it was not good that Ella should be startled, shocked, or grieved.

They dined well.

But in the night Sidney had a recurrence of his old illness—a bad attack; and Horace sat up through dark hours, fetched the doctor, and bought things at the chemist's. Towards morning Sidney was better. And Horace, standing near the bed, gazed at his stepbrother and tried in his stupid way to read the secrets beneath that curly hair. But he had no success. He caught himself calculating how much Sidney had cost him, at periods of his career when he could ill spare money; and, having caught himself, he was angry with himself for such baseness. At eight o'clock he ventured to knock at Ella's door and explain to her that Sidney had not been quite well. She had passed a peaceful night, for he had, of course, refrained from disturbing her.

He was not quite sure whether Sidney had meant him to stay at the hydro as his guest, so he demanded a bill, paid it, said good-bye, and left for Bonn-on-the-Rhine. He was very exhausted and sleepy. Happily the third-class carriages on the London and North-Western are pretty comfortable. Between Chester and Crewe he had quite a doze, and dreamed that he had married Ella after all, and that her twenty thousand pounds had put the earthenware business on a footing of magnificent and splendid security.

V

A FEW months later Horace's house and garden at Toft End were put up to auction by arrangement with his mortgagee and his trade-creditors. And Sidney was struck with the idea of buying the place. The impression was that it would go cheap. Sidney said it would be a pity to let the abode pass out of the family. Ella said that the idea of buying it was a charming one, because in the garden it was that she had first met her Sidney. So the place was duly bought, and Sidney and Ella went to live there.

Several years elapsed.

Then one day little Horace was informed that his uncle Horace, whom he had never seen, was coming to the house on a visit, and that he must be a good boy, and polite to his uncle, and all the usual sort of thing.

And in effect Horace the elder did arrive in the afternoon. He found no one to meet him at the station, or at the garden gate of the pleasance that had once been his, or even at the front door. A pert parlourmaid told him that her master and mistress were upstairs in the nursery, and that he was requested to go up. And he went up, and to be sure Sidney met him at the top of the stairs, banjo in hand, cigarette in mouth, smiling, easy, and elegant as usual—not a trace of physical weakness in his face or form. And Horace was jocularly ushered into the nursery and introduced to his nephew. Ella had changed. She was no longer slim, and no longer gay and serious by turns. She narrowly missed being stout, and she was continuously gay, like Sidney. The child was also gay. Everybody was glad to see Horace, but nobody seemed deeply interested in Horace's affairs. As a fact he had done rather well in Germany, and had now come back to England in order to assume a working partnership in a small potting concern at Hanbridge. He was virtually beginning life afresh. But what concerned Sidney and Ella was themselves and their offspring. They talked incessantly about the infinitesimal details of their daily existence, and the alterations which they had made, or meant to make, in the house and garden. And occasionally Sidney thrummed a tune on the banjo to amuse the infant. Horace had expected them to be curious about Germany and his life in Germany. But not a bit. He might have come in from the next street and left them only yesterday, for all the curiosity they exhibited.

"Shall we go down to the drawing-room and have tea, eh?" said Ella.

"Yes, let's go and kill the fatted calf," said Sidney.

And strangely enough, inexplicably enough, Horace did feel like a prodigal.

Sidney went off with the precious banjo, and Ella picked up sundry belongings without which she never travelled about the house.

"You carry me downstairs, unky?" the little nephew suggested, with an appealing glance at his new uncle.

"No," said Horace, "I'm dashed if I do!"

JOHN GALSWORTHY

(1867–)

JOHN GALSWORTHY was educated at Harrow and New College, Oxford. He was intended for one of the learned professions, with a certain bias toward the bar. The publication, under the *nom de plume* of John St. John, of his first book, *Villa Rubein* (1900), and its encouraging reception, enheartened his enthusiasm for a literary career. *The Island Pharisees* (1904) foreshadowed the series of works which have now come to constitute the famous *Forsyte Saga*, as illuminative a picture of an epoch in our social history as anything contemporaneous with it. Plays, novels, and short stories have come in a steady stream from him, all marked by a thoughtful viewpoint and a fastidious style unequalled by contemporary writers.

"The House of Silence," from *A Commentary* (1908), is reprinted by kind permission of the author, Messrs. William Heinemann, Ltd., and Messrs. Charles Scribner's Sons.

THE HOUSE OF SILENCE

WITHIN the circle of the high grey wall is silence.

Under a square of sky cut by high grey buildings nothing is to be seen of nature but the prisoners themselves, the men who guard the prisoners, and a cat who eats the prison mice.

This house of perfect silence is in perfect order, as though God Himself had been at work—no dirt, no hurry, no lingering, no laughter. It is all like a well-oiled engine that goes—without a notion why. And each human thing that moves within this circle goes, day after day, year after year—as he has been set to go. The sun rises and the sun goes down—so says tradition in the House of Silence.

In yellow clothing marked with arrows the inhabitants are working. Each when he came in here was measured, weighed, and sounded; and, according to the entries made against his number, he received his silent task, and the proper quantity of food to keep his body able to fulfil it. He resumes this silent task each day, and if his work is sedentary, paces for an hour the speckless gravel yard from one number painted on the wall to another number painted. Every morning, and on Sundays twice, he marches in silence to the chapel, and, in the voice that he had nearly lost, praises the silent God of prisoners; this is his debauch of speech. Then, on his avid ears, the words of the preacher fall; and motionless, row on row he sits, in the sensual pleasure of this sound. But the words are void of sense, for the music of speech has drugged his hearing.

Before he was admitted to this house of silence he had endured his months of solitude, and now, in the small whitewashed space, with a black floor whence he has cleaned all dirt, he spends only fourteen hours out of the twenty-four alone, except on Sundays, when he spends twenty-one, because it is God's day. He spends them walking up and down, muttering to himself, listening for sound, with his eyes in the little peep-hole in the door, through which he can be seen but cannot see. Above his mug and plate of shining tin, his stiff, black-bristled brush and a piece of soap, is raised a little pyramid of godly books; no sound or scent, no living thing, no spider even, only his sense of humour comes between him and his God. But nothing whatever comes between him and his walking up and down, his listening for sound, his lying with his face pressed to the floor; till darkness falls, that he may stare at it, and beg for Sleep, the only friend of prisoners, to touch him with her wings. And so, from day to day, from week to week, and year to year, according to the number of years set opposite the name that once was his.

The workshops of the House of Silence hear no sound but that of work; the men in yellow, with arrows marked on them, are busy with a fearful zest. Their hands and feet and eyes move all the time; their lips move too, without sound. And on these lips is seen no smile—so perfect is the order.

And their faces have one look, as though they said: "We care for nothing—nothing; we hope for nothing—nothing; we work like this for fear of horror!" Their quick dull stare fastens on him who comes to watch their silence; and all their eyes, curious, resentful, furtive, have in the depths of them the same defiant meaning, as though they saw in their visitor the world out of which they have been thrown, the millions of the free, the millions not alone all day and every day, the millions who can *talk;* as though they saw Society, which bred them, nurtured them, and forced their steps to that exactly fitting point of physical or mental stress, out of which they found no way but the crime rewarded with these years of silence; as though they heard in the footsteps and the muttered questions of this casual intruder the whole pronouncement of man's justice:

"You were dangerous! Your souls, born undersized, were dwarfed by Life to the commission point of crime. For our protection, therefore, we have placed you under lock and key. There you shall work—seeing, hearing, feeling nothing, without responsibility, without initiative, bereft of human contact with your kind. We shall see that you are clean, and have a bare sufficiency to eat, we shall inspect and weigh your bodies, and clothe them with a bare sufficiency of clothes by day and night; divine service you shall have; your work shall be apportioned to your strength. Corporal punishment we shall very seldom use. Lest you should give us trouble, and contaminate each other, you shall be silent, and, as far as possible, alone. You sinned against Society; your minds were bad; it were better if in our process you should lose those minds! For some reason which we cannot tell, you had but little social instinct at the start; that little social instinct soon decayed. Therefore, through bitter brooding and eternal silence, through horror of your lonely cells, and certainty that you are lost—no good, no mortal good to man or thing—*you shall emerge cleansed of all social instinct.* We are humane and scientific, we have outgrown the barbarous theories of old-fashioned law. We act for our protection and for your good. We believe in reformation. We are no torturers. Through loneliness and silence we will destroy your minds that we may form fresh minds within the bodies of which we take such care. In silence and in solitude is no real suffering—so we believe, for we ourselves have never passed one single silent day, one single day alone!"

This, by the expression of their eyes, is what the men in yellow seem to hear, and this, by the expression of their eyes, is what they seem to answer:

"Guv'nor! You tell me I did wrong to get in here, brought up like I was—born in the purple—Brick Street, 'Ammersmith. My father was never up against the police; epileptic fits is what he went in for—I oughtn't to have had him for a father; I oughtn't to have had a mother that liked her drop o' trouble, leavin' me what you might call violent from a child. That's where the little difficulty was, you see. The bloke that came about my girl knows that, seein' he laid two years upon his back after I'd done with 'im. That set 'em on reformin' me. To do the business proper, guv'nor, they gave me six months solitary to start on. All them six months I asks meself: 'If I were out again, an' he came hanging round my girl—what would I do?' And I answers: 'Hit 'im like I done!' You tell me I oughtn't to have been thinkin' that; guv'nor, I 'adn't nothin' else to think on. Only that, an' what was goin' on outside, with me there buried-up alive. You tell me that ther' solitude ought to ha' done a lot for me, an' so it did. I ain't never been the same man since. Well, when I came out I made a big mistake, I find, to have that sentence up against me, in the earnin' of me livin' honest, like as though I'd never been in prison. I oughtn't to 'ave been a carpenter, I guess, or anythin' where people 'as to trust yer, not likin' them about their houses as has been in quod; I ought to ha' had a trade that didn't need no dealings with my fellow-creatures. You tell me what I wanted was to love me neighbour? But guv'nor, after I come out, I got regular wasted on *that* job. When you get wasted, guv'nor, you take to drink; your stomach feels a funny shiverin'; what it wants is warmth, a bit of fire—so, when you gets a sixpence, you lays it out in warmth. That's wrong, you say. But, lucky guv'nor, drink puts heart into a man as has to get his livin' out of lovin' his neighbour. . . . Soon after that I got another little lot, with nine months' solitude, to put me straight. When you eat your heart out for want o' somethin' else to do, when your mind rots for the need of ever such a little bit to chew on, when you feel all day and every day like a poor dumb varmint of a caged-up rat—like as not you hit a warder, guv'nor. When you hit a warder, it's the cat. This time I ought to ha' come out p'raps a different man—an' so I did. I ought to ha' had a different mind, bein' chastened and taught the love o' God; but, seein', guv'nor, that when I come to think it over, which was all day and every day, I couldn't really find out what I had done which in my case any other man would ha' stopped short o' doin—bein', *not any other man, but me*—I come out that time meanin' to go upon me own. And on me own I went, and ever since I've been—an out-an'-outer, as you can see with lookin' at me now. An' if you ask me what I think of all o' you outside, I can't reply, seein' I'm not allowed to speak. . . ."

This is the answer that they seem to make, their lips move, but no sound comes.

The warder watches these moving lips, his eyes, the eyes of a keeper of wild beasts, are saying: "Pass on, sir, please, and don't excite the convicts—you have seen all there is to see!"

And so the visitor goes out into the prison yard.

On to the grey old building a new grey block is being built; it runs up high already towards the square of sky; and on the pale scaffolding are prisoners cementing in the stones. A hundred feet up, they move with zest, helping to make the little whitewashed spaces safe, to hold—themselves; helping to make thick the walls, that they may hear nothing, and their own moaning may be smothered; helping to join stone to stone, and fill the cracks between, that no creature, however small, may come to share their solitude; helping to make the window-spaces high above their reach, that from them they shall look at—nothing; helping to hide themselves away out of the minds of all who have not sinned against man's justice; for, to forget them in their silence and their solitude is good for man, and to remember them, unpleasant. The sky is grey above them, they are grey against the sky; no sound comes down but the smothered tapping of their tools.

The visitor goes out towards the prison gate; and, meeting him, come three convicts marching in—the tallest in the centre, an old man with active step and grey bristles on his weather-darkened face. Light darts into his eyes fixed on the visitor; he bares his yellow teeth and smiles. His lips move, and out of them come words. So, when skies have been dark all day, the sun gleams through, to prove the beauty of the Earthly Scheme. These words—the precious evidence of purifying solitude, the only words that have been spoken in the House of Silence, come faintly on the prison air: "Ye —— ——!"

W. B. MAXWELL

WILLIAM BABINGTON MAXWELL has inherited the literary tastes of his mother, "Miss Braddon." He has written a considerable number of novels of great merit, which have achieved great popularity. To mention only a few: *The Ragged Messenger* (1904), *The Guarded Flame* (1906), *Mrs. Thompson* (1911), *The Devil's Garden* (1913), and *Gabrielle* (1926).

"The Long-Distance Train" is reprinted by kind permission of the author.

THE LONG-DISTANCE TRAIN

AT that time the Tudor Green station-master was a Mr. Read. Not long since promoted to this position, he seemed a rather insignificant although businesslike sort of person, but internally he often suffered with acuteness even while outwardly calm.

Perhaps conscious of his own essential incompetence, he was always wondering how he had risen so high and always fearing a fall. He dreaded making mistakes. Sometimes he woke all cold with fear in the middle of the night, and lay quaking beside his young wife after a dream of a terrible railway accident that had been caused by him.

"Anything wrong?" murmured Mrs. Read, roused by his restless movements.

"No, dear, nothing. Go to sleep again. Sorry I disturbed you."

As in the case of many successful men, he had often the bitter taste of failure in the midst of his success. He felt the want of solid strength behind the grand external show. He felt it while going his rounds in the early morning. Men were shunting a truck by hand, and he hustled them feebly; then he hurried away, to avoid hearing their grumblings. Hankinson, his chief staff officer, yawned and answered him curtly; and Mr. Read for a moment intended to reprove him, and then did not. Instead he left the platform, walked along by the metals past the little gardens of the porters, and went up into the signal cabin. He saw something slightly wrong there, but never spoke of it. He would speak next time.

This often happened—little things about the station not quite as they should be. Or so it seemed to him. A railway station ought to be entirely spick and span, and that is how he wished his station to be. But people did not support him as they should have done. They were careless, not malevolent, he told himself. Want of thought, not want of heart. They wouldn't see, as he did, that an important place like Tudor Green ought to have not only a busy, well-conducted station, but a *popular* station. And he felt, in the whole surrounding atmosphere, that it was not really popular.

Then the authorities told him so. He was summoned to the offices at the great terminus and hauled over the coals about it.

He offered such excuses as he could—hundreds of trains in and out, both electric and steam, none too large a staff, natural impatience of city gentleman as a race. "I have a good deal to contend against, sir." This was a favourite expression of his, and as he used it he rubbed his sandy side whiskers and blinked his mild blue eyes.

They asked him if he was properly served. "Come, spit it out. If any of your staff are inefficient, say so."

For a moment then he thought of smashing Hankinson with a word, but the next moment he had a mental vision of fat Mrs. Hankinson and the four Hankinson children. Moreover, with the vision there came a queer, unexpected thought that old Hankinson, although stupid, dilatory, and sometimes impudent, was really rather fond of him.

"No, sir. No complaints," he said stoutly. "If there's blame, I take it on myself."

And he went back to Tudor Green rubbing his right-hand whiskers and feeling sad and dejected.

After this he made feeble little efforts to popularise the place without losing the ideal of spick-and-spanness. As, for instance, he procured a large black dog with a slung money-box to go about the platforms wagging its tail and collecting pennies for the railway orphanage; he arranged for the opening of a flower stall as a thing apart and distinct from the fruiterer's shop; and at Christmas he persuaded the people of W. H. Smith and Son to decorate all three bookstalls with holly and coloured paper.

Not only for meals but during spare minutes he used to run up into the station-master's house—a sham Gothic erection that dominated the whole station—and cheer his wife by telling her the station news. Thus, toward noon on a foggy March morning, he opened their sitting-room door and saw her seated near the window with her hands folded in her lap in the listless, almost forlorn attitude that of late had become habitual with her.

"Well, how's the world treating you?" she asked, turning her head languidly.

She was a dark-haired, and unquestionably pretty woman of about twenty-eight; and when he first saw her, a hundred miles from here, she had a glowing bright complexion, with eyes that seemed to have flames of health in them, but now her cheeks were pale and the flash of her glance had gone. Looking at her he felt an inward stab of discomfort, if not actual pain, as he thought that perhaps, after all, the air of Tudor Green and the Thames Valley did not really suit her.

"Well," he said cheeringly, "we had a little unpleasantness just now. Yes, Nellie, Berry's clerk gave short change again, and the gentleman was very indignant. But I smoothed him down all right. There'll be no report made. . . . The girl at Abbot's flower stall has a sore throat, and has wrapped a piece of flannel round it. It's very unsightly. . . . The eleven-twenty loop was shockingly late. Too bad of them. But of course I knew they had a lot to contend against—fog all along the river, held up at Tide-End crossover, and a horse box put on to them at Staines. . . . Hark!"

Down below an electric train had come in with its once strange but now well-known clatter, and up here in the living-room it was as though a very slight earthquake had happened. Two cheap and terribly unattractive vases on the mantelshelf were set tinkling by the vibration, and they continued to tinkle while Mr. Read went on talking.

"It's the eleven-fifty-seven down! They don't need me for that. Hankinson can—— Oh, by the bye, I thought you were going for a walk with Mrs. Hankinson."

"In this fog. No, thank you."

"The fog's cleared up. Yes, the fog's cleared up nicely." Mr. Read said this very cheerfully, as if it was a piece of news to make anybody happy. "The sun'll break through too. I assure you, it's a regular spring day."

"I'm glad to hear it," said Mrs. Read fretfully. "I shouldn't have known it otherwise. All the days here seem pretty much the same—and the seasons too, if it comes to that."

"Ah," said Mr. Read, wincing, but maintaining his cheerful smile, "you're a country girl, aren't you? And when I say spring you begin to think of the primroses on the banks, or the vi-lets beginning to show themselves in the woods."

"Oh, don't, *please*."

"I understand, dear," said Mr. Read gently, and he rubbed his hands together in a deprecating manner. "The country's a grand place.

But you'll admit that the town has some compensations to offer in exchange. All the life and gaiety."

"All the what?" said Mrs. Read.

"Well—I meant, if only the shops."

"The shops make one gay—don't they?—when you can't ever afford to go in and buy anything."

Mr. Read scratched his chin as a change from his side whiskers.

"I am aware you feel the loneliness," he said, slowly and dully. "But that's why I wished you to make friends." Then he resumed his cheerful aspect. "Now, look here. I want you to go out straight away, to oblige me. Yes, I want you to, for a particular purpose." And, pointing to the mantelpiece, he said he wished her at once to buy the porcelain ornament about which they recently had had a discussion.

"I don't want it. It was hateful of me to ask for it."

"No, not a bit. So natural. Pretty people like you ought to have pretty things about them." He had brought a leather purse from the inside pocket of his frock coat, and he laid a treasury note on the table. "There, run out and buy it. Then you can throw those vases in the dustbin, as you said—or give them as a present to somebody less fortunate than us."

Having put on his gold-laced cap he was going, but she came to him and kissed him.

"Oh, how good you are to me! Only, take back the money. I don't want the thing—not any more—honour bright." And, clinging to him, she burst into tears. "I'm hateful to you—and you're too good to me, oh, much too good."

"There, there," said Mr. Read huskily, "don't cry. Nothing to cry about"; and he drew her closer, and himself kissed her. But as he held her in his arms, enfolding her with this intimate embrace, and feeling his heart melt in tenderness and pity, he had a sudden dreadful sensation that, instead of her being his longed-for comrade, his girl that he had wooed and won, his wife, she was a complete stranger. "It's all right. Let's make the best of things, not the worst."

"You must forgive me and make allowances," she sobbed. "I'm sorry—but I don't know how it is. My spirits are like your trains. They seem to go up and down forty times a day."

"Nellie, I know well you aren't quite yourself." Still holding her, he looked at her face anxiously. "I've noticed the ups and downs. Your health, dear—this last month especially. It has not been what it should be." And as he said this he flushed and his whole face seemed to lighten. His pale eyes glowed with the brightness of hope. "D'you think your upsets mean—— Do you think the real reason may be only just what we desire?"

But Mrs. Read shook her head negatively, and said it didn't mean that.

They had no children. That was his supreme failure, altogether the worst thing he had to contend against and perhaps because of it or out of it there had come all this paralysing, deadening sense of secret incompetence.

"Ta-ta," he said. "Wanted now. That's the twelve-three."

There was a nearer and rather bigger earthquake in the room. A steam train had come up. Mr. Read hurried away.

Their household consisted of three persons, themselves and a stupid but honest old woman called Emma who acted as servant. But, although with a servant to wait upon her, Mrs. Read herself worked too. She rose early, went out to do the marketing, and then was active for a few hours, cleaning the rooms, sometimes with wild ardour; cooking a little, preparing the midday meal to be cooked by Emma. And all this time the station was throbbing and shaking beneath her feet; a thousand footsteps sounded in the booking-hall; if she looked out of a window she saw a flat lead-covered roof with fifty yards of platform below it densely thronged with black city toilers all standing there silent, motionless, a white newspaper in hand, as they waited for their train. The train came in, hiding them all, and then left with an empty platform behind it. Three minutes later, if she looked out once more, the platform was full again, apparently with just the same people.

But by about half-past ten the station became quiet, and, moreover, her work was finished. There was no further work to do, unless she made work, invented work. She sat down by the window of the living-room or climbed the stairs and took a survey from the top floor.

And it was then that the fourth dweller in the house made his presence perceptible. This was the dread companion of men and women that we call the Giant Ennui, or Emptiness, or Frustration, as the case may suggest. He took possession of Mrs. Read day after day, making her his, using her as he chose, since he recognised her as that easiest of all victims, a wife whose husband cannot satisfy her wants. And between caresses he whispered the most abominably depressing things.

"Is this life, Nellie Read?" said the whisper. "Or is it death? Was it for this that you forsook fresh air, a laughing brother and sister, jolly rustic friends and admirers? Is it for this that you always lower your eyes or turn your head when men look at you? Was it to help you gain this that God gave you your face, your heart, and your graceful limbs, together with your wonderful, flaming, instinctive certainty that it would be in your power to open the gates of Heaven for anyone you really loved? Twenty-eight years old too, already. And a foggy morning. And those damned blue vases. Oh, dear; oh, dear! I'm sorry for you, Nellie."

In the view from the upper floor the most prominent features were the clock tower, the peaked roofs of the part of the station they called the junction, whence started the trains for the underground and tube railways, with the glass-screened passenger bridge over what they termed the through lines, but across all this she used to stare at the dull haze that obscured the eastward sky and spoke to her of London itself, vast, mysterious, near at hand, and yet playing as little part in her life as if it had been a city of dreams or a place surmised to exist in another planet.

It was almost impossible to believe in it as multitudinously alive, full of bright faces and high hopes, full of loves, joys, wickednesses. The little electric trains were always running to it and returning from it, restarting another ten-mile journey as soon as they had completed the last one, and these trumpery trains seemed to her like her own thoughts, always going to and fro over the same dull ground and never getting clear away. The so-called through trains merely ran out into the valley, made a loop, and were driven back to the great terminus. These balked, thwarted steam trains were like one's sentimental and romantic ambitions, cut short and brought to nothing by the narrow limits of one's monotonous existence.

But toward the end of March a tremendous event was announced. For the first time in history a long-distance express train was coming through the station. It would start from a Channel port, skirt round London, and go racing away to the north. It would be the longest-distance train in the United Kingdom. It would come up one day and go down the next, three journeys each way for the week, and on the seventh day it would rest.

The station-master came bounding upstairs to tell Mrs. Read all about it. His hands were full of the pink railway bills, and he stammered from excitement as he explained how, because of the geographical position and its connecting links with all parts of the metropolis, Tudor Green had been selected as a stopping-place.

"How long will it stop?"

"Two minutes—not a second more. Yes, I shall have to push her through inside of two minutes. Oh, Nellie dear, this means a great deal to me."

It was his chance. He recognised it at once. There was an opportunity of impressing himself on the world and solidifying himself with the company. The long-distance train must raise the prestige of the whole place, and with the growing fame of his station he would become famous too. He made great preliminary efforts—efforts that included a letter to the local newspaper.

"As and from March thirty-one," wrote Mr. Read, "and linking as it does the north and south of our island without change of compartment, this achievement of railway enterprise fires the imagination. . . ."

There was no doubt that it fired the imagination of Mrs. Read. She could think and talk of nothing else.

She was on the platform to see its first arrival. Everything had been swept and garnished; porters were lined up like soldiers; Inspector Hankinson, stung to rapid motion by excitement, flitted here and there; her poor little husband, with fresh gold lace on his cap, was marching about or standing in a Napoleonic attitude.

"Stand back there! Stand back!"

No one was standing forward, but all felt the strain.

The gigantic black shining engine towered high above them; the huge coaches glided past with an unbroken scarlet name-board above the windows; the restaurant car glittered like a small Crystal Palace; then the vast overwhelming thing came to rest.

Mrs. Read watched and glowed. Four or five people got out of the train. Nobody got into it. A man at a compartment window shouted for a newspaper, and Smith's boy with his tray ran to him.

"Take your seats. Take your seats." The porters were calling the new words they had learned. Take your seats for Leicester, Nottingham, Sheffield, Leeds, for Durham—for impossibly remote places. It seemed to her that they were crying, "Take your seats for novelty, for freedom, for paradise." A whistle, a white cloud of exhaust steam, then the tremendous puffs, each puff like a thud against one's heart, and the train was moving again. It was gliding past her. It had been panting to get away from this dead suburban world, and it seemed to give a long shiver of relief. She shivered too.

She watched it every day, dressing herself for it in her best clothes, as if she were going to church. Those two minutes had more life in them than the whole of the twenty-four hours. They *were* the day.

Sometimes she sat on a bench all the time gazing with ardent eyes, noticing and absorbing every minute detail of its passage. Always, always, there was interest, excitement. Such wonderful people got out of it and changed to the other lines—strong sunburnt people utterly unlike anæmic residents of the suburb; people with magnificent handbags, aristocrats; people that she knew must be Americans; tall, elegant women with coloured veils and grey male companions in tortoise-shell spectacles; once policemen with a terrible prisoner in handcuffs, a murderer perhaps.

Almost at once she noticed the man in the train, the man who had shouted for a newspaper. He came up on Monday and went down on Saturday every week. He travelled in the Sheffield coach.

For the first two or three times that he looked at her and smiled at her so boldly she lowered her eyes. Then he kissed the tips of his fingers to her. She rose from the bench and walked away in a dignified manner. But all the evening she thought of him; in imagination seeing the train as it dashed across dark moorlands or through deep, wild ravines near to its destination; seeing the brightly lit compartment, with him in it smoking a cigar or reading a book in the corner by the corridor. He was big and strong, inclined to be stout even, with smooth red-brown cheeks and a fierce reddish moustache. How old? Forty-five—forty-three at the lowest. With surprising correctness she guessed that he was a commercial traveller of some large firm.

On the following Monday he stood as usual at the door of the compartment, and he made a sign to her as if inviting her or ordering her to approach. She looked up and down the platform to see if her husband or anybody else was observing her, and then went to the carriage.

"What is it?" she asked quietly. "Do you want a newspaper?"

"No, I wanted to speak to you."

"Indeed," and Mrs. Read, flushing and using words that she felt were utterly inadequate to so portentous an occasion. "Then I consider it great cheek your beckoning to me like that. Yes, I do."

" 'He either fears his fate too much!' You're acquainted with the quotation?" and leaning out of the compartment window as if trying to get his face close to hers, he talked in a way that almost took her breath away. He had the glib eloquence that belongs to his profession, and was able to lighten it with the half-facetious tone that will sometimes obtain an order when argument is exhausted. "O sweet and mysterious lady, who and what are you? As you are beautiful, be kind. I have named you the Duchess of Tudor Green. That is what you are, isn't it?"

"Certainly not," she said, still inadequately.

"A countess. A countess at the least."

"Nothing of the sort."

"Then what has this dust heap, this back yard of the universe, done to deserve your constant presence?"

She could not help smiling at this, and she told him that she was the wife of the station-master. "If you must know."

"But your name."

"Why should I tell you my name?"

"Because I am going to write to you."

"No, no."

"Oh, yes. And I want to address my letter properly. If you don't tell me, I shall address it to The Entrancing Wife of the Tudor Green Station Master."

"How can you be so silly. No, indeed."

She was frightened. She looked at him with an appeal in her eyes and spoke like a child. "You'd get me into an awful row if you did that."

"Then give me your name."

"Take your seats, take your seats," cried the porters. "Next stop Leicester."

"Your name."

"Read," she said weakly. "R-E-A-D."

Then as the train glided out of the station, she went with slow, heavy footsteps up the stairs to the booking-hall, and up again to the house. Two minutes! It seemed incredible that her husband had dispatched the train within the prescribed time. The train seemed to have been there for hours.

All that evening she was thrilled, excited, but angry with herself. Next morning she woke with a sense of some queer, unexplained sort of happiness, like the memory of a dream; and then, also inexplicably, this gave place to a feeling of even greater blankness and dulness than she had experienced in the past. By ten-thirty she understood and, worse still, mentally acknowledged what was the matter with her. She wanted to see that man again, and the trouble was that between now and the possibility of seeing him, there stretched the appalling stream of empty routine made up by five interminable days. She could not see him till six o'clock on Saturday.

It was mere nonsense his saying he intended to write to her. Of course he would not write.

But he did. The letter was a declaration of love; and she answered it, reproving him. And after this, although they talked to each other so often, they exchanged many letters.

Passengers for the train were more numerous, lots of people got in and out, sometimes the two minutes were all bustle and confusion. Thus everything was favourable to the progress of their flirtation. She told herself thousands of times that it should never be anything more than that. Yet she knew it was very dangerous.

As soon as Mr. Read's back was turned she used to go swiftly to the carriage door and stand there, watchful and alert, while their light talk continued. She made it as light as she possibly could.

"What you had better do," said the man, "is to come with me one day."

"Oh, that's likely, isn't it?"

"Why not? Run up north and back next day."

"Thank you; much obliged," and she laughed.

Then one day Mr. Read saw that she was talking to somebody in the train and asked who it had been.

"So funny," she said. "A friend of my cousins—the Lamberts—up at Sheffield."

"Cousins—Sheffield—Lamberts. I never knew that you had relations up there."

"Oh, yes—two families. The Lamberts and the Balls. Mother's people, you know."

He did not know, but he believed her. He had not the faintest suspicion that she was lying.

But thence onward she was more careful. The man, however, had no care; he did reckless, mad things.

"Do look out," she said anxiously. "Oh, let me go."

He had seized her hand and he held it.

"Stop struggling. If you struggle, I'll pull you inside and carry you off with me." His face was hot and red, and the glib words poured from him. "Say you love me. I'll make you say it. I'll hold your hand till you say it."

"Let me go." She was scared, trying to laugh, almost ready to cry. "Of course I don't love you. Duchesses don't fall in love with strange men in trains."

"Be quiet. Nobody's looking. Listen. I shall be off the circuit soon. I shan't come south at all. I'm going to Belgium. Say you like the feel of my hand, really. You want me as much as I want you."

"I don't. Let me go. Oh, I'll never speak to you again."

"All right." He had released her. He stood a little way from the door with his hands plunged in his pockets, and he glared at her. "You needn't worry. I never want to speak to you again either." And he seated himself in the furthest corner of the carriage, and sat there with his back toward her. He did not even turn round when the train moved.

That evening she wrote a letter to him, the doubly fatal letter that women always write on such occasions. First, it is fatal to write at all; and, second, it is fatal to say the things they say. But they all seem to do it, employing nearly the same words always. One could write the letter for them.

"It has made me wretchedly miserable," wrote Mrs. Read, "to know that you are so angry with me. But it is not my fault. You must surely see my point of view. It is all very well for you, but——" And so on and so forth.

Next day she looked as she had described herself, miserable; white, limp, and dejected, as she used to look in the dull, long winter before the train started running. She told old Emma she must do the work unaided. Then, two days later, the post brought her comfort. He was not inexorably angry. She helped Emma, she laughed and sang on the stairs, and from that day she abandoned the famous "point of view," she thought no more of whether things were right or wrong, wise or foolish, cheap or prodigiously costly. She had determined to tear out of the heart of life all that it can yield before it grows cold and changes to unthrobbing, unfeeling death.

When she told her husband that she would like to go up north, spend a night with her cousins, and come back next day, he made no objection. It seemed to him so natural that she should want to have a trip in the splendid train.

"I suppose," she said, "you could get me a free pass, couldn't you?"

"Yes, I suppose so. . . . Oh, no doubt I can," said Mr. Read hopefully; and he added that he would go up to the terminus and ask them at the traffic manager's office this very afternoon.

But they refused to grant the favour. Both mortified and indignant, Mr. Read bought a first-class return ticket. He told her that it was a pass, and looked for her delight at seeing that it entitled her to travel first-class. However, she said nothing, until presently, observing that it seemed like an ordinary ticket, she questioned him. Then he was forced to admit that he had bought and paid for it with his own money.

"Oh, but that's too good of you—much too good." And after a pause she said meditatively, "Suppose I changed my mind and didn't go, would they give you back your money?"

"I doubt it."

Why had she asked? She knew that she was going, really.

On the morrow he saw her into the train himself, hurrying her along, seeking a comfortable compartment.

"Here, this will do," she said, and she turned the handle of a door.

The compartment was empty except for a large man in the far corner. The station-master hesitated. On principle he liked to put ladies with other ladies. But this was a corridor coach. Moreover, Mrs. Read had already got in. He handed in the dressing case after her. The big man took no notice of them, not even looking up from his paper.

"Bye-bye," whispered the station master; "take care of yourself." And he hurried off to his duties.

She did not come back next day. She wrote to say she was never coming back.

Mr. Read showed the world a stiff, if rather jerky, sort of dignity in his misfortune and disgrace. Except for a few words with Emma and Inspector Hankinson he refused to speak of the matter, giving out to everybody that his wife would be returning before long. Stupid as was old Emma, she had had suspicions, and in spite of confusion and excitement Hankinson had seen things and thought about them. For one thing he had seen the man in the train. He would know him anywhere.

"You'd know him yourself," he said. "You must have spotted him."

"If you ever see him in the train again, you tell me," said Mr. Read. "Tell me that instant."

But the man was never seen again.

One night as Mr. Read sat at supper Emma's stupid affection compelled her to touch upon the forbidden subject.

"You don't eat, sir, like you did—and that ain't right with all your work and responsibility. If I may say it, sir, you'd far better stop fretting for her. And b'lieve me, there's as good fish in the sea as ever came out of it."

The station-master thanked her for her faithful kindliness; but next day he paid her her wages, gave her a present, and dismissed her. He engaged an even older woman, who came for an hour in the morning and in the evening. He pigged it thus as well as he could.

Once, too, Hankinson spoke to him in the gentle, kindly voice of genuine commiseration.

"You know, I am sorry this should have happened."

"Nothing has happened," said the station-master, flushing and trembling. "Mrs. Read has gone away for change of air, and will be back soon."

Throughout the summer he nourished a sort of superstitious belief that his wife would come back to him, but he was unable to prepare or even think of the attitude he should adopt in such an event, although he could see himself and hear himself all day long in imagined scenes when brought face to face with the man. He knew about that all right. He or the man should die.

Nowadays he hated the train. It sickened him and set him trembling as it smoothly crept in; the imagined noise of it when far away filled his brain; the sheer deadly weight of it swung with remorseless force through his dreams. In the torment of his thoughts the train and the man had become all one. Brutal and overwhelming both of them, together they symbolised destiny, destiny that for years ignores you, then comes from afar, knocks you down, passes over you, crushing you like a worm. Sometimes as he stood on an almost empty platform all alone, thinking, he had what the French call an *éblouissement*. Although the signals had not been taken off, although no electric bell had rung, a visionary train was bearing down upon them; it seemed to come tearing and rending space; it flashed past, an invisible whirlwind of iron, steel, woodwork, glass, and steam. Mr. Read put a shaky hand to his forehead and shaded his eyes. The whole world was shaking.

He was glad that the train itself had failed to attract. Of course everything in the slightest way connected with him must turn out badly, but in this case he did not mind. He felt pleased. With the beginning of the regular tourist season passengers for the train grew less. Tudor Green people never used it, its coaches became emptier and emptier. By the end of September all the line knew that the allied companies had decided to abandon their experiment. Then soon came the definite announcement that "as and from November first" the train would cease to run.

The station-master watched one of his staff pasting on the bills.

On the 30th of October the long-distance train passed through on its last northward journey. It was a wretched foggy day, with the fog outside clearing toward evening, but still filling the station, and about seven the station-master, standing on the down platform, had the worst of his *éblouissements*. A miserable, bedraggled woman, getting out of a third-class carriage of a train from London, suddenly emerged upon him like a ghost in shrouds of vapour and touched his arm. It was his wife.

"Step upstairs," said Mr. Read shakily. "The door's unlocked. I'll follow you soon as I can. . . . Yes, sir, this is Tudor Green. No, you don't change anywhere for Tide End."

Her aspect was that of the guilty wife in a melodrama. Her garments were shabby, her face was white, her eyes seemed dark, tragically hollow. As she sat crouching by the fire that the old woman had lighted for her in the living-room and as Mr. Read stood looking at her and making vague gestures with his hands, he had a clear vision of her as she used to be not very long ago; so fresh and healthy, when he came to the gate of her mother's house and she was waiting for him in the little garden among the country flowers, a country flower herself, waiting for *him*, her sweetheart. Pity welled up from his tortured heart, flooding him, drowning him. It was his fault, truly. They would say so at the Day of Judgment. She had put herself and her life into his hands, and he had been unable to hold them or protect them. He was a failure.

She confessed that she had been with the man all this while, in Belgium. Now he had cast her off. She wanted her husband to forgive her.

Mr. Read said that he would do so.

While she told her tale he was compelled to leave her once or twice and run downstairs to attend to business. When he came back she went on with it again. As soon as she had done she began to cry.

"There, that's enough," cried Mr. Read, gulpingly and huskily. "We'll make the best of things, not the worst. I've told you I'm prepared to—let bygones—let bygones . . . A fresh start together, if—if you'll loyally——" But he could not continue. Suddenly he sat down at the table and wept much more loudly than she. "Oh, God! All my life! Yet I've tried—never, never have I ceased trying. Oh, my God."

The old woman came in, laid the table, brought the supper; and later on, when they sat at their meal, they were able to talk quite naturally. In the lamplit peace of the room, with only the noises and tremblings that did not disturb either of them, it was almost like old times. She asked him questions—even a question about the train.

"No, not a success. Coming off. . . . Yes, to-morrow we shall see her last trip." And he scratched his side whiskers and blinked his eyes.

Then that same night, very late, she made a further confession. She was going to have a child.

This finished him. It was more than he could contend against—this notion of her having a baby and of him not being the father.

Next day the fog had gone. At six o'clock the night was dark and still, with approaching frost in the air. A little interest was displayed when the long-distance train came in for the last time. Ticket collectors descended the steps for the last look; the two barmaids were in the doorway of the refreshment-room; Smith's boys peered into its empty restaurant car. The station-master was there, of course, but he did not so much as glance at it. As the enormous engine loomed up under the footbridge he called to Inspector Hankinson.

"Hankinson, take charge. Hold her the full two minutes. Then shove her off. I'm wanted."

And he hurried along the platform and disappeared. He had gone down to the path that leads to the southern signal cabin.

Two minutes. The train glided out of the station for the last time. But it stopped again about four hundred yards further on and stood there in the darkness, with its tail lamps glowing like luminous blood, people shouting from the signal cabin, the rear guard coming back between the metals, and passengers putting their heads out of windows and asking if there had been an accident.

At the inquest they said it was an accident; and the coroner expressed great sympathy with the widow, who, as he understood, was about to become a mother.

"OLE-LUK-OIE"

(1868–)

"OLE-LUK-OIE" (the pseudonym of Major-General Sir Edward Dunlop Swinton, K.B.E., C.B., D.S.O.) was educated at Rugby and Cheltenham, entered the Army in 1888, obtaining a commission in the Royal Engineers. He served in South Africa, where he obtained his captaincy. In the European War he first served as the official "Eye-witness," subsequently journeying through the United States on behalf of the Allies. At one time Controller of Information, Department of Civil Aviation, in 1925 he became Chichele Professor of Military History for Oxford University.

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CUVÉE RÉSERVÉE

OR, THE WIDOW'S CRUSE

> And lately, by the Tavern Door agape,
> Came shining through the Dusk an Angel Shape
> Bearing a Vessel on his Shoulder; and
> He bid me taste of it; and 'twas—the Grape!
> —THE RUBAIYAT.

THE sentry leaned over the bridge and hissed between his teeth. A man standing underneath, attired in nothing but a grey shirt, looked up.

"Jest tell the corporal of the guard to come up here a minute, will you?"

"Carn't *you* do it? Me feet are bare, old son," was the protest.

"No; I don't want to whistle, and I've got me eye on something."

The semi-nude one picked his way grumbling along the rock, among scraps of iron and stones, and disappeared behind the nearest pier. The sentry shaded his eyes with his bandaged hand and again stood at gaze, looking steadily towards the south.

The day was brilliant with true South African brilliancy, and the scene was one of cheerfulness almost amounting to gaiety. From the soft blue of the sky and the deeper blue and violet of the fantastically shaped hills all round—which looked as if they had been cut out of tin, so well defined were their edges in the clear atmosphere—right across the intervening stretch of yellow veldt and green bush to the river, was one giant pattern of subdued colour. The air had been cleared by the slight local shower which had fallen during the night, and heavy storms towards Basutoland had swollen the spruit and converted the chain of almost stagnant pools of the day before into the eight-foot torrent which was now flowing—as befitted a tributary of the mighty Orange—red and turgid. At the point where the bridge crossed it, the stream curved in a horseshoe bend to the south. On the south bank, on the outside of the curve, the flood had reached the soil and was fretting it away in great lumps, which fell periodically and with sudden splash; on the other side, the water lapped over the slope of sheet rock, picking up pieces of paper, straw, and the thousand and one oddments of a camp and workshop, which danced about merrily till they were drawn into the current and whisked downstream. In the shade underneath the undamaged part of the bridge, where the rock was still uncovered, heaps of wood-shavings and scrap-iron showed what had been the carpenter's and smith's shops during the reconstruction. At these spots the word "TIMMERWINKEL" and "SMEDERIJ" had been painted in foot-high letters on the smooth rock by some wag of the erstwhile workers possessed of a knowledge of the official language across the border. On the pier itself, where there was no trace of bar or even liquor store, the words "GOED KOOP WINKEL—WHO SAYS A COOLER?" in emerald green, bore witness that the artist possessed the gentle gift of satire as well as that of tongues.

The detachment, the tents of whose camp could be seen close by on the north, had just come to this spot in order to guard a recently repaired railway bridge not far from the border of Cape Colony; but beyond the stacked rifles underneath and the armed sentry on top, there were no conspicuous signs of war. The little force, including officers—all, in fact, except the guard—were taking advantage of the God-sent water. It was an opportunity not to be missed. Some, like boys, were wallowing about in the flood with merry din and splashing; others were squatting at the water's edge, busy beating out their "grey-back" shirts on the stones.

The sentry stood on top of the end girder, where the old bridge ended and the trestles began. It was the highest point above the veldt for some three miles, and he had the disadvantage of conspicuousness; but this was not of much importance, for the bridge itself was visible above the surrounding bushes for many hundreds of yards. It needed no figure in khaki standing on top to announce the presence of a British force.

Brightly as the whole scene was coloured, its brilliance seemed to culminate at the sentry. Near his feet the dull chocolate hue of the ironwork was relieved by the gaudy colour of a freshly riveted patch, which glistened in its recent coat of red-lead. Across this his shadow fell—a purple bar. There was nothing brilliant about the faded khaki of the uniform or the tanned face; but the blue of the sky was out-rivalled by that of the bandage on his left hand. Many a squalid scene in South Africa indeed owed its only relief—in an artistic sense—to the universal veldt-sore and its alembroth-gauze dressing. Yes, the sentry was the centre of interest, to himself at least, for he continued to peer towards the south with a perturbed expression.

Very soon another soldier hurried across the bridge, each step ringing out on the iron slats of the narrow four-foot way. Climbing up alongside the watcher, and incautiously placing his hands on the half-dried paint, he arrived at the top with smeared uniform and vermilion palms, and around him the atmosphere of gaiety and peace was instantaneously dissipated! He finally concluded by addressing the sentry.

"Well, what is it now? Some more blarsted ostriches?"

"No," replied the soldier, who seemed sensitive on the point, in a ruffled tone, "it ain't. It's mounted men and wagons or guns. See that flat kopje? Well, under the hump at the end, jest to the left of the—one—two—three—fourth telegraph post."

"By gum! y're right; it ain't birds this time. That's a big cloud of dust. There's a crowd of men under that, I lay."

There was indeed at the point indicated a thick column of yellow dust which gleamed in the sunlight: the rain of the night before had been slight. At this range the watchers could not know that, caught under the last wagon of the approaching force, where the escort did not notice it, was a dead bush. Nothing better calculated to exaggerate the size of a force seen from afar than this improvised broom could have been devised. At a distance the result might have made even a brigadier pause and think!

It must be explained that these events occurred at a kaleidoscopic period of the war when no post knew what to expect. At one hour a solitary rider or a convoy of remounts, practically without escort, might appear; the next it might be a prowling commando. The detachment at the river was one of the Thabe 'Nchu Thrusters, an irregular unit in which things were done first and reported—or not—afterwards. Very, very rarely did matters take the officially proper channel, usually a tortuous one, badly buoyed and lighted even for the regular.

In this case the corporal did not call a sergeant for his opinion, and no sergeant, after inspection, called upon an officer for his. The N.C.O. on the spot was satisfied that a large force was approaching, arms and the men were close at hand, and the captain had only recently lectured them on the importance of accepting responsibility and not taking chances. It was enough.

"Let her go, Gallagher!" he muttered, and, placing his first and little finger between his lips, he gave a "butcher's whistle" three times.

The effect was electrical. Within a minute Michael Angelo's celebrated cartoon of soldiers surprised while bathing was reproduced with up-to-date effects. There was a shouting, splashing, and scurry, a hasty scramble for shirts, boots, and bandoliers, then a mob of men, some nude, many bootless, but all armed, ran to their various alarm posts. All knew their positions, and within three minutes there was hardly a man visible except those on the bridge.

The Commandant and the second-in-command, the latter with a lathered chin, rushed coatless from a tent and joined the little group on the top of the bridge, now augmented by the addition of a corpulent sergeant. With the precipitancy of youth—they were subalterns—the officers scrambled up quickly. It was not until they had both placed their hands well on to the red-lead patch that the sergeant turned round and thoughtfully remarked——

"Beg pardon, sir—that's wet paint there."

Once again there was some little unpleasantness on that girder-top. When things had quieted down a bit, it was, according to the custom of the Service, the sergeant and not the corporal, nor of course the private, who proceeded to explain the cause of alarm. Unfortunately for formality, besides having begun badly, the sergeant had not himself had time to discover exactly where the danger lay. Thus, vagueness in facts was added to nervousness in demeanour.

Throwing routine overboard, the Commandant—one Lieutenant Wolfe—cut him short and asked generally:

"Come, come. Who's seen what and where?"

Like one man, corporal and sentry started off to elucidate the situation; but the former's tone caused the private to drop out of the race and leave the last word with his senior. Glasses were brought to bear on the dust-cloud, now strangely shrunk in size.

"Umph!" said Wolfe after a steady stare. "That's only a wagon or two, and I never saw burghers, even a commando, come along a track with all that song and dance."

"No more Boers than we are," curtly echoed the second-in-command, Lieutenant John Orle, as he put down his glasses. Being called out for nothing in the middle of a shave does not lead to unnecessary suavity.

Without more ado Wolfe pulled out a whistle and blew loudly. Like so many meerkats half a hundred men popped up in all directions and turned towards the bridge; "Carry on," he shouted, waving his arm; and the garrison left their lairs, and, with many scowls at the sentry, proceeded back to stack arms. The Commandant turned to the man who had caused the trouble:

"What the deuce d'you mean, Corporal Dockery? I don't call that *much* dust."

"Well, sir, the Captain said we were to take no chances, an' me an'

Riley here thought it was a large body. There don't seem to be so much dust now, but two minutes ago there was quite a lot. Riley saw it as well as me." There was now more hesitation in coming forward on the corporal's part than there had been. He appeared to rely somewhat on the junior for corroboration.

"Yes," replied that luckless man eagerly, thus drawing fire on himself, "it ain't nothing now to what it was."

"Oh, rats!" was the unsympathetic reply. "You were not born yesterday, and you know as well as I do that Boers don't show themselves like that. You won't be popular if you play this game often, and I daresay we'll be having some men touched up by the sun after this damfool business," and the speaker looked wrathfully at his hands as if for signs of the disease. The sergeant and corporal had both gradually edged away into the background during this speech, and for whomsoever the reproof was intended, it was the sentry who got it.

Wolfe turned to the white-chinned Orle. "I'll go out and meet them and see who they are." With that he strolled across the trestles and out over the veldt, and the garrison resumed its interrupted ablutions. The loss, in the hasty assembly, of some of their few priceless pieces of soap considerably increased the general annoyance. There was no reticence about its expression, which was quite audible and not comforting to the aggrieved watcher now again alone on high. *He* had got all the blame, but after all it was the Non-Com. who had sounded the alarm. Besides, it had been a big cloud—a very big cloud—much more than a wagon or two could make. 'Twas in vain that he puzzled over the inexplicable change. How was he to tell that a large bush had suddenly dropped from underneath a vehicle of the approaching force?

It was not long before Wolfe returned with the strange party. It consisted of one subaltern and four men of the "A.E.S.R." or All England Seaside Rifles, with two wagons; the officer was riding. He was a nice-looking youngster, by name Stanley Simkin, but was not at all the type usually associated with the real-business-and-no-dam-swagger-and-that-sort-of-rot volunteer soldier. He was beautifully dressed and wonderfully equipped, all his gear being as fresh as himself, and his pink complexion, smooth hair, and eyeglass were suggestive of a stage Guardsman. He was on his way northwards *viâ* Grampian's Pont, conveying stores up to regimental headquarters.

"No, I am afraid this is no good," Wolfe was saying as they came up, speaking of the drift close to the bridge; "there must be a good six feet of water over it now. You'd better doss down here for the night; these floods go down as quickly as they rise, and if it stops raining away up in Basutoland, you will be able to cross to-morrow."

"Thanks, awfully good of you, but I must reach the Pont as early as possible. Isn't there some other ford, I mean drift, anywhere within a reasonable distance?"

"Oh, yes, there's Valk Drift about four miles away. It's a toss-up whether that will be passable either; but the spruit is broader there, and I daresay it may be. If you think it's worth chancing, have a bite with us, and I'll ride out with you afterwards. We can pick up a Dutch farmer on the way who will guide us across the drift. I don't know it well, and it's crooked and not properly marked."

Simkin was profuse in thanks. The mules were outspanned, and officer and men came across to enjoy the hospitality of the irregulars for lunch. During this simple meal, at which the last tin of asparagus was broached in his honour, the guest's rather stiff manner thawed, and he gave his hosts a great deal of interesting information about his regiment, relating how the various corporate bodies of the watering-places of England had competed to fit it out with every conceivable and inconceivable luxury. Perhaps he was a bit full of "Ours," but it was natural, and not a bad trait in a young officer. In their jealousy Wolfe and Orle seriously discussed the advisability of resigning their appointments in their own rough-and-ready corps and travelling home to join the All Englands. They also gave Simkin many "facts" about South Africa—its climate, customs, flora, and fauna, and especially about the ways of Brother Boer. Though British born, they had been in the country for many years, quite long enough to teach the brand-new, open-eyed Simkin a thing or two, and his arrival only afforded pleasant and healthy exercise for the imaginative powers. He did not make a hearty meal, the "bully" and the flies were too much for him as yet, and after smoking some of his excellent cigars the little party set off to the west, taking the farm of one Koos Van der Merwe—a worthy and now painfully loyal Dutchman—on the way, in order to obtain his services as guide. Simkin quite expanded under the genial influence of the swashbuckler; and it was in a cheery conversation that the tedium of the road was enlivened, for Wolfe was a light-hearted fellow, and made the most of all chances of enjoyment. The volunteer asked many questions about the enemy, and seemed to be extremely pugnacious. They found the farmer at home and quite willing to guide, and it was not long before they were standing on the north side of the swollen river. Here they halted a minute, in order to give the dripping mules a rest and to have a last word.

"So long! When the spruit is full already, it is not easy, Captain. *Maar alles zal recht kom*, eh?" said the bearded guide, turning to Simkin.

"No, by Jove! You guided us top hole." The expression somewhat puzzled Koos, but coming of a race not easily abashed, he was in no way put off his stroke.

"You have some coffee, perhaps, eh? My wife, she tell me to ask the Captain." The volunteer was now puzzled: not knowing of the dearth of coffee in many farms in the north of Cape Colony at that time, he imagined that this was a well-meant but somewhat belated invitation on the part of Mrs. Van der Merwe.

"*So* sorry; 'fraid I can't—must be gettin' on. Please thank your wife, though: it's awf'lly good of her."

The cadging and once more mystified Dutchman grinned idiotically and scratched his ear. Wolfe, who was greatly enjoying all this—what he would have called Blind Man's Buff—was about to explain Van der Merwe's meaning when Simkin broke in tentatively, as if fearful of giving offence: "I say, don't you think we might celebrate the occasion—crossing of the Rubicon and all that sort of thing—eh, what?"

"Most appropriate," said Wolfe promptly. "I'm sure old man Koosie looks as if he could lap down something and agrees with the governor of North Carolina, and who am I—to say nay? *You* know how a detachment mess is always treated."

This service platitude was indeed a *coup de Jarnac*, for though the irregular's knowledge only extended to one detachment mess, the volunteer had no knowledge, and the imputation of experience was pleasing.

"Ra*ther*," he said, and went up to a wagon.

After fumbling under the tarpaulin he produced a straw case, and in a matter-of-fact way drew out from it a champagne bottle. Wolfe's heart leaped; but he had so often drunk whisky poured from champagne bottles, pickle bottles—once even from a blacking bottle—that the palpitation was only temporary. When, however, he saw the unbroken gold foil and read on the visible half of the label

DRY
18—
VEUVE CLICQUOT—
REIMS

he coughed and rubbed his eyes. Meanwhile his host had produced three mugs, and was calmly manipulating the wire. When he had handed round the wine he removed his eyeglass, polished it with a silk handkerchief, and smiled.

"It's all right, I think—perhaps a trifle dry, but *quite* a good brand—eh, what?" There was no answer. Both his listeners were too astonished for words. He went on, "Your health! I am extremely obliged to both of you," and bowed in courtly fashion to his two guides.

"Ch-cheero!" stammered Wolfe, when he had recovered himself, with that indescribable twist of the head which indicates a desire for another man's prosperity.

"Gezondheit! Alles ten beste!" said the Dutchman.

"Would you care to take a bottle to Orle, and you one to your wife?" was the next thing that shook the still dazed Wolfe.

"Eh?" he replied.

"Wouldn't you like a bottle for your mess?"

"Take one with me? Yes!"

Wonders did not cease: some more fumbling and Simkin calmly produced two more straw cases, which he handed over. Quite forgetting to thank him, Wolfe simply stared at the wagon.

"I say," he remarked at length gravely.

"Yes."

"Have you got a wagon of bubbly there?"

"Well, not quite full. It's a present to the regiment from the mayors and the corporations of the watering-places of England."

The irregular smiled; but he was badly shaken, and the smile was a veneer which did not hide the wistful regret underneath.

"Yes," drawled Simkin, lighting a cigarette, "and I've had to wait to bring it up. Awful noosance stopping behind for this, don't cherknow, when all the other fellows are at 'the Front.'" He pronounced the last words as if printed in inverted commas, just as he had seen them below hundreds of portraits in picture papers—A Hero "At the Front," The Wife of a "H.a.t.F.," The Little Son of a "H.a.t.F.," The Boots of a "H.a.t.F.," and so forth.

"Yaas, of course," said Wolfe. "It must be." *He* had had plenty of the fly-blown front for some time. He went on:

"It's awfully jolly up there. Why not go up by mail train yourself, old man? You may be cut out of some big thing by hanging round here with these rotten stores. *You* go up. Leave the stuff with me and I'll send it along in a truck after you. The R.S.O. at Grampian's is a pal of mine, and I can get a truck very quickly."

Wolfe could not tell whether Simkin's expression was one of pure fatuity or cunning as he said, "Thanks awfully, but I've got orders to bring it up by road myself and not to lose sight of it. Must obey orders, you know."

"Of course, of course, if that's the case," said Wolfe. "Nothing more doing here *yet*," was his thought as he rose.

"Good-bye, and good luck. It's not a very difficult track to Grampian's, but it winds about a good bit and is overgrown now."

Koos and he carefully picked up their prizes. As the pair slowly re-forded the river, Simkin gave the word to trek, and with many shouts from the Kaffir drivers the convoy moved northwards.

On his way back Wolfe was assailed by temptation. He thought of making Van der Merwe stand and deliver his ill-gained loot. What did a Dutch farmer know even of gooseberry? And this was Veuve Clicquot of a special year. It would be wasted on him and his ample *vrou:* they would far prefer coffee. But the soldier's better instincts prevailed, and a feeling of *noblesse oblige*, which he himself would have called "cricket," prevented the dastardly act contemplated. Both rode on in silence, marvelling at the lunacy of a man who not only wandered about the veldt with a wagon-load of liquor, but let people know of it. At the parting of their ways the Dutchman turned off towards his farm, and Wolfe galloped to camp cursing the fate which had allowed him to assist in getting that wagon across the river before he knew what was in it. Arrived in camp, he walked straight up to the stuffy mess tent, outside which Orle was sitting.

"Hullo! Why this hurrah-face? Struck an outcrop?" was the latter's greeting.

Keeping one hand behind his back, Wolfe stalked slowly up to the plank on two barrels which formed the mess table before he replied. "Aha! So long—already. You vait one meenit!" He took his hat off and spun it round on his finger. Had Orle not known his senior's light-hearted ways, he might have been perturbed. Wolfe continued: "Vait one leetle meenit: you vatch dis hat—hein? Vot you like? I pull for you a life rhabbit or some echte golddfisch—I call 'im Minnie—I call 'im Charrlie—Boom!"

While his puzzled audience blankly stared at the spinning hat, Wolfe quickly placed his burden on the table, and, whipping off the straw cover, struck the true conjuring attitude. "See vot I gif you! Vot you tink? Hein? Der is no decebtion, ladies and shentlemens! Rah, Rah!"

Orle watched, silent.

"*You*, my well-beloved and trusty lootenant, go out foraging and bring back a brace of koorhahn or a measly sprenghaas. I produce a bottle of bubbly, allwoolla, top-hole brand too, and none of your just-as-goods!"

Now the secret was out. There was no question, no unnecessary curiosity. Fetching a tin-opener and two mugs, Orle silently opened the bottle. In half a minute the two Thrusters were regarding each other over the brims of their mugs and wagging their heads with the usual formula.

"Here's to our guest! Bless him," added Wolfe.

"Now," said Orle, wiping his moustache, "tell us all about it. Who've you been robbing? Not our petted Percy?"

"Jack," replied the other with a sigh of content, "that fellow of the All Englands may be a petted, kid-gloved, glass-house Percy, but he's a white man and a peach, and has a perfect action in dealing drinks."

"Did *he* give you this?"

"Yes; and not only this, young feller-me-lad, but he gave Koos Van der Merwe another, and we cracked one on the spot after getting across!"

"Three?"

"Yes. The little brute, if you please, has a wagon full up to the gunwale of it——" He was interrupted by an exclamation from Orle, but continued. "I know what you are thinking. I've been kicking myself all the way home, too. If we had only known——! But there it is—he's across now. It'll take him some time to reach the Pont, though, and he's not out of reach yet if Grafter and Davey drop in this afternoon, as they said they would. We must fix up something with them. It would be a crime to let him go past our fellows with all this stuff. He's dying to chuck it away, and will only waste it on those greedy brutes farther on. They'll be round him like flies. Whatever happens, you bet his mess will never see much of it."

"But tell us all about it."

"Well, we picked up old man Koos all right. He was at home and only too keen to oblige. When we got across, of course the slim old verneuker starts his usual song and tries to cadge coffee for the missus—thought he'd a soft thing on; but he was properly scored off, because——" There was a sound of hoofs, and the speaker jumped up, exclaiming, "Here they come—Grafter and Davey," as two fresh officers cantered up.

"Hello!" was the shout of the foremost as he saw the table. "What have we here? Tea in a gooseberry bottle or a drop of the real stuff? All to yourselves, in the afternoon too! What'cher been up to? Railway accident, hospital train smashed up—salvage—willing helpers lend a hand—eh?"

"Let 'em all come," said Wolfe, lifting up the bottle and examining it; "there's just a toothful left for each of you. It's no gooseberry, my sons; look at this," and he pointed to the label, while Orle produced a cracked tumbler and a teacup.

"Now, you two," said Wolfe, "if you want a drop more of the same dog, just listen. Let ons maak a plaan." They listened. "There is an almighty fool—no, he's a dear boy really—who is now trekking with two mule wagons and four or five men from Valk to the Pont. He left the drift about three o'clock and his mules have been going since morning, so you can figure out his pace for yourselves. The point is that one of his wagons is bang-full of champagne!"

"Ikona!" came as one word from the two newcomers.

"Fact; present from home, if you please, for the regimental mess—'All Englands.' But never mind that: he's got the stuff," Wolfe slapped the bottle conclusively. "And he seems inclined to throw it about. Van der Merwe and I guided him over the drift, and we scoffed a quart on the spot and each brought a bottle away with us."

"Didn't Van der Merwe—er—lend—you his?" suggested Grafter with meaning.

"No, no; I draw the line somewhere. Now, it's a pity to waste what Providence has put in our way, and we mustn't let those other brutes up north get it all. Orle and I can do no more now—we have done our bit; but there are lots of us between this and Grampian's. That's the size of the situation, and I leave it to you. You can run it your own way; but I advise you to ride after him, ask him where he is going, play the Samaritan, tell him he's gone astray, take him round a bit, and put him back on the same road. And if you don't each get a bottle, I'll eat my hat!"

No more was necessary. The "Samaritans" were already mounting. One leaned forward to Wolfe.

"See here, old son. What's wrong with holding him up? Ambush the lot. Shoot a mule or two from cover, and then Davey and me ride up in the nick of time, having driven off the enemy?"

"No, I wouldn't; dangerous. He's got some men; they're all armed, and little Percy is all right—only he doesn't know who to watch. If he thought it was 'hostilities,' he'd hoist half a dozen Union Jacks and fight to the bitter end, and someone might be killed or wounded. No, no, it won't do; it's gently that does the trick. Afterwards you can pass the good news on to Batley and the others."

"How about the wagon breaking down?"

"Can't be done in daylight with four men round it. Besides, that'll be a last resource when he gets fed up with giving away quarts of fizz to friendly guides. You'd better do as I say, but I don't care a darn how you do it: there it is, take it or leave it, only don't kill anybody, and if you get an extra bottle or two somehow, think of me and Jack here. Get a move on. The sooner you work it the more chance for the next lot."

"You're a beauty; thanks. Good-bye. Good-bye, Jack. Come on, Dave," and the two cantered off northwards side by side in deep consultation. Wolfe and Orle chuckled as they watched them out of sight, then turned to their duties, which, though not heavy, were extremely monotonous when nothing happened. Their little excitement was over, but the bright sun which shone on the bridge guard was also shining on a small convoy now some miles away, and upon two brigands pricking o'er the plain towards it in a small cloud of dust.

. . . .

Some six days later Lieutenant Wolfe had cause to go by train to Grampian's Pont. He arrived towards evening, when the station was crowded. The train which had brought him drew up in a siding some distance from the platform, and he got down on to the ground. On the main line alongside was another train just about to start for the north. As he strode along the row of trucks he saw an officer trying to climb into one with some difficulty. It was not an unusual occurrence, but something familiar in the man's appearance at once attracted the Thruster's eye. Upon a second glance he saw that this officer, though looking a little older, much dirtier, and more in keeping with his background than at the time of their last meeting, was no other than Lieutenant Simkin of the All Englands. Evidently much hampered by a straw bundle that he was carefully hugging under his arm, he only succeeded in getting aboard as Wolfe got abreast of him. The engine whistled. Wolfe jumped up with one foot on the axle-box and held on to the side.

"Hello, old chap! you still here, and railing up! What's happened to your convoy?"

Simkin, besides looking decidedly the worse for wear, seemed too depressed to show much surprise or any cordiality at his friend's appearance. "Yes, it's me. Had the devil's own time since we last met. Lost my way several times, had several—almost too many—kind friends to put me straight though, but when I got near this infernal den of thieves everything went wrong." The train began to move with a series of jolts, which, as they reached Simkin's truck, almost threw down the redoubtable Wolfe. "Wagons kept on breaking down; mules went lame, strayed, fell sick; lost nearly all my stuff, so I dumped the remainder on the rail, and here I am. Had enough trekking."

The train was gathering speed, and Wolfe had to drop off and run. Though surprised and breathless, yet like the good officer he was, he did not get confused or lose his head. He went straight for the—to him—strategic point.

"Good Lord! lost all that bubbly?" he panted.

"Oh, no," said the "Peach," raising his voice as Wolfe fell behind in the race. "Not all; I've got *this!*" and taking the straw case from under his arm he withdrew a fat bottle with sloping shoulders and gold top, which he triumphantly brandished.

Wolfe waved a farewell and stopped running. The train rumbled on into the gloom.

Thoughtfully he picked his way behind it towards the station, muttering, "Well, that beats the band—all gone! Some of these irregular corps are simply hogs. Just my luck! Five minutes earlier and I'd told him that he was in the wrong end of the train, shoved him into another truck, and then——" There came back to him a scene of a river in flood. Above the swirl of water he heard the snapping of wire, the pop of a cork, and the words, "Perhaps a trifle dry, but *quite* a good brand—eh, what?"

ERNEST BRAMAH

ERNEST BRAMAH'S principal works are *The Wallet of Kai Lung* (1900), *The Mirror of Kong Ho* (1905), *Kai Lung's Golden Hours* (1922), and *The Specimen Case* (1924).

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THE MALIGNITY OF THE DEPRAVED MING-SHU REARS ITS OFFENSIVE HEAD

As Kai Lung turned off the dusty earth-road and took the woodland path that led to his small but seemly cottage on the higher slope, his exultant heart rose up in song. His quest, indeed, had not been prolific of success and he was returning with a sleeve as destitute of silver taels as when he had first set out, but the peach-tree about his gate would greet him with a thousand perfumed messages of welcome, and standing expectant at the door he would perchance presently espy the gracefully outlined form of Hwa-mei, once called the Golden Mouse.

"As I climb the precipitous hill-side," he chanted,
"My thoughts persistently dwell on the one who awaits my coming;
Though her image has never been wholly absent from my mind.
For our affections are as the two ends of a stretching cable—united by what divides them;
And harmony prevails.
Each sunrise renews the pearly splendour of her delicate being;
And floating weed recalls her abundant hair.
In the slender willows of the Yeng-tse valley I see her silken eyelashes,
And the faint tint of the waving moon-flower tells of her jade-rivalled cheek.
Where is the exactitude of her matchless perfection——"

"There is a time to speak in hyperbole and a time to frame words to the limit of a narrow edge," interposed a contentious voice, and Shen Hing, an elderly neighbour, appeared in the way. "What manner of man are you, Kai Lung, or does some alien Force possess you, that you should reveal this instability of mind on the very threshold of misfortune?"

"Greetings, estimable wood-cutter," replied Kai Lung, who knew the other's morose habit; "yet wherefore should despondency arise? It is true that the outcome of my venture has been concave in the extreme but, whatever befall, the produce of a single field will serve our winter need; while now the air is filled with gladness and the song of insects, and, shortly, Hwa-mei will discern me on the homeward track and come hurriedly to meet me with a cup of water in her hand. How, then, can heaviness prevail?"

At this, Shen Hing turned half aside, under the pretext that he required to spit, but he coughed twice before he could recompose his voice.

"Whence are you, amiable Kai Lung?" he asked with unaccustomed mildness; "and have you of late had speech with none?"

"I am, last of all, from Shun, which lies among the Seven Waterheads," was the reply. "Thinking to shorten the path of my return I chose the pass known as the Locusts' Leap and from this cause I have encountered few. Haply you have some gratifying tidings that you would impart—yet should not these await another's telling, when seated around our own domestic hearth?"

"Haply," replied Shen Hing, with the same evasive bearing, "but there is a fall no less than a rise to every tide, and is it not further said that of three words that reach our ears two will be evil?"

"Does famine then menace the province?" demanded Kai Lung uneasily.

"There is every assurance of an abundant harvest and already the sound of many blades being whetted is not unknown to us."

"It can scarcely be that the wells are failing our community again? Fill in the essential detail of your shadowy warning, O dubious Shen Hing, for I am eager to resume my homeward way, whatever privation threatens."

"It is better to come empty-handed than to be the bearer of ill news," answered the sombre woodman, "but since you lay the burden on my head it is necessary that you should turn your impatient feet aside to ascend yonder slight incline," and he pointed to a rocky crag that rose above the trees. "From this height, minstrel, now bend your discriminating gaze a few li to the west and then declare what there attracts your notice."

"That is the direction in which my meagre hut is placed," admitted Kai Lung, after he had searched the distance long and anxiously, "but although the landmarks are familiar, that which I most look for eludes my mediocre eyes. It must be that the setting sun——"

"Even a magician cannot see the thing that is not there," replied

Shen Hing meaningly. "Doubtless your nimble-witted mind will now be suitably arranged for what is to follow."

"Say on," adjured Kai Lung, taking a firmer hold upon the inner fibre of his self-control. "If it should be more than an ordinary person can reasonably bear I call upon the shades of all my virtuous ancestors to rally to my aid."

"Had but one of them put in an appearance a week ago it might have served you better, for, as it is truly written, 'a single humble friend with rice when you are hungry is better than fifteen influential kinsmen coming to a feast,'" retorted Shen Hing. "Hear my lamentable word, however. It has for some time been rumoured that the banners of insurrection were being trimmed and spears of revolt made ready."

"There was a whisper trickling through the land when I set forth," murmured Kai Lung. "But in this sequestered region, surely——"

"The trickle meanwhile grew into a swiftly moving stream although the torrent seemed as though it would spare our peaceful valley. Like a faint echo from some far-off contest we heard that the standard of the Avenging Knife had been definitely raised and all men were being pressed into this scale or that of the contending causes. . . . High among the rebel council stood one who had, it is said, suffered an indignity at your requiting hand in the days gone by—Ming-shu his forbidding name."

"Ming-shu!" exclaimed Kai Lung, falling back a step before the ill-omened menace of that malignant shadow. "Can it be that the enmity of the inscriber of the mandarin's spoken word has pursued me to this retreat?"

"It is, then, even as men told?" declared Shen Hing, with no attempt to forego an overhanging bitterness, "and you, Kai Lung, whom we received in friendship have brought this disaster to our doors. Could demons have done more?"

"Speak freely," invoked Kai Lung, averting his face, "and do not seek to spare this one's excessive self-reproach. What next occurred?"

"We of our settlement are a peaceful race, neither vainglorious nor trained to the use of arms, and the opposing camps of warriors had so far passed us by, going either on the Eastern or the Western route, and none turning aside. But in a misbegotten moment Ming-shu fell under a deep depression while in his tent at no great space away, and one newly of his band, thinking to disclose a fount of gladness, spoke of your admitted capacity as a narrator of imagined tales, with a special reference to the serviceable way in which the aptitude had extricated you from a variety of unpleasant transactions in the past."

"That would undoubtedly refresh the wells of Ming-shu's memory," remarked Kai Lung. "How did he testify the fulness of his joy?"

"It is related that when those who stood outside heard the grinding of his ill-assorted teeth, the rumour spread that the river banks were giving way. At a later period the clay-souled outlaw was seen to rub his offensive hands pleasurably together and heard to remark that there is undoubtedly a celestial influence that moulds our ultimate destinies even though we ourselves may appear to trim the edges somewhat. He then directed a chosen company of his repulsive guard to surprise and surround our dwellings and to bring you a bound captive to his feet."

"Alas," exclaimed Kai Lung. "It would have been more in keeping with the classical tradition that they should have taken me, rather than that others must suffer in my stead."

"There can be no two opinions on that score," replied the scrupulous Shen Hing, "but a literary aphorism makes a poor defence against a suddenly propelled battle-axe, and before mutual politeness was restored a score of our tribe had succumbed to the force of the opposing argument. Then on the plea that a sincere reconciliation demanded the interchange of gifts they took whatever we possessed, beat us heavily about the head and body with clubs in return and departed, after cutting down your orchard and setting fire to your very inflammably constructed hut, in order, as their leader courteously expressed it, 'to lighten the path of your return.'"

"But she—Hwa-mei," urged Kai Lung thickly. "Speak to a point now that the moment must be faced—the cord is at my heart."

"In that you are well matched, for another was about her neck when she went forth," replied Shen Hing concisely. "Thus Ming-shu may be said to possess a double hold upon your destiny."

"And thereafter? She——?"

"Why, as to that, the outlook is obscure. But a brigand with whom I conversed—albeit one-sidedly, he standing upon this person's prostrate form meanwhile—boasted of the exploit. Hwa-mei would seem to be a lure by which it is hoped to attract some high official's shifting allegiance to the rebel cause, she having held a certain sway upon him in the past."

"The Mandarin Shan Tien—now a provincial governor!" exclaimed Kai Lung. "Thus our ancient strife asserts itself again, though the angles ever change. But she lives—at least that is assured."

"She lives," agreed Shen Hing dispassionately, "but so likewise does Ming-shu. If he was your avowed enemy, minstrel, you did wrong to spare him in the past, for 'If you leave the stricken bull his horns he will yet contrive to gore you.'"

"It is no less written, 'The malice of the unworthy is more to be prized than an illuminated vellum,'" replied Kai Lung. "Furthermore, the ultimate account has not yet been cast. In which direction did Ming-shu's force proceed, and how long are they gone?"

"One who overlooked their camp spoke of them as marching to the west, and for three days now have we been free of their corroding presence. That being so, the more valiant among us are venturing down from about the tree-tops and to-morrow life will begin afresh, doubtless as before. Have no fear therefore, story-teller; Ming-shu will not return."

"It is on that very issue that I am troubled," was Kai Lung's doubtful answer. "Ming-shu may still return."

"Then at least do not show it, for we are all in the same plight," urged the woodman. "To-morrow we assemble to repair the broken walls and fences, so that in the association of our numbers you may gain assurance."

"The spirit you display is admittedly contagious," agreed Kai Lung. "In the meanwhile I will seek my devastated ruin to see if haply anything remains. There was a trivial store of some few bars of silver hidden about the roof. Should that hope fail I am no worse off than he who possesses nothing."

"I will accompany and sustain you, neighbour," declared Shen Hing more cheerfully. "In sudden fortune, whether good or bad, men become as brothers."

"Do so if you feel that you must," replied Kai Lung, "though I would rather be alone. But in any case I will do the actual searching—it would be the reverse of hospitable to set you to a task."

When they reached the ruin of his once befitting home Kai Lung could not forbear an emotion of despair, but he indicated to Shen Hing how that one should stand a reasonable distance away while he himself sought among the ashes.

"A steady five cash a day is better than the prospect of a fortune." Shen Hing busied himself looking for earth-nuts, but in spite of the apt proverb his sombre look returned.

"Even this slender chance has faded," reported Kai Lung at length, approaching Shen Hing again. "Nothing remains, and I must now adventure forth on an untried way with necessity alone to be my guide. Farewell, compassionate Shen Hing."

"But what new vagary is here?" exclaimed Shen Hing, desisting from his search. "Is it not your purpose to join in the toil of restoring our settlement, when we, in turn, will support you in the speedy raising of your fallen roof?"

"There is a greater need that calls me, and every day Hwa-mei turns her expectant eyes towards the path of rescue," replied Kai Lung.

"Hwa-mei! But she is surrounded by a rebel guard in Ming-shu's camp, a hundred li or more away by now. Consider well, story-teller. It is very easy on an unknown road to put your foot into a trap or your head into a noose, but by patient industry one can safely earn enough to replace a wife with a few successful harvests."

"When this one lay captive in Ming-shu's power, she whom you would so readily forsake did not weigh the hazards of snare or rope with an appraising eye but came hastening forward offering life itself in two outstretched hands. Would a dog do less than follow now?"

"That is as it may be and I have certainly heard some account of the affair at various times," replied Shen Hing craftily, for he well knew that Kai Lung's reciting voice would lighten the task of each succeeding day. "But even a beggar will not cross a shaking bridge by night, and how are you, who have neither gold wherewith to purchase justice nor force by which to compel it, to outdo the truculent Ming-shu, armed at every point?"

"I have sandals for my feet, a well-tried staff between my hands, a story on my lips, and the divine assurance that integrity will in the end prevail," was Kai Lung's modest boast. "What therefore can I lack?"

" 'In the end?' " repeated Shen Hing darkly. "Admittedly. But an ordinary person inclines to something less ambitious provided it can be relied upon more towards the middle. You are one who is prone to resort to analogies and signs, Kai Lung, to guide you in the emergencies of life. How can you then justify a journey entered upon so suddenly and without reference to the omens?"

"He who moves towards the light has no need of the glow of joss-sticks," replied Kai Lung, indicating the brightness that still lingered in the sky. "The portent will not fail."

"It is certainly a point to be noted," confessed Shen Hing, "and I cannot altogether expect to dissuade you in the circumstances. But do not overlook the fact that the sun has already set and nothing but dark and forbidding clouds now fill the heavens."

"We can only see the clouds, but the clouds can see the sun," was the confident reply. "Success is a matter of luck, but every man obeys his destiny."

With this inspired pronouncement Kai Lung turned his back upon the ruin of his unassuming home and set out again, alone and destitute, upon an unknown path. Shen Hing pressed into his sleeve the few inferior nuts that he had laboriously collected, but he did not offer to accompany the story-teller on his way. Indeed, as soon as he was reasonably sure that he was free from interruption the discriminating wood-cutter began to search the ashes on his own account, to see if haply there was not something of value that Kai Lung had perchance overlooked.

"SAKI"

(1870–1916)

"SAKI" (the pseudonym of H. H. Munro) served a long apprenticeship in journalism, and first made his mark as a writer of biting humour and brilliant imagination in the pages of the old *Westminster Gazette*. A more than promising career was cut short by his untimely death in action in 1916.

"The Reticence of Lady Anne," from *Reginald in Russia* (1910), is reprinted by kind permission of Messrs. John Lane, The Bodley Head, Ltd.

THE RETICENCE OF LADY ANNE

EGBERT came into the large, dimly lit drawing-room with the air of a man who is not certain whether he is entering a dovecote or a bomb factory, and is prepared for either eventuality. The little domestic quarrel over the luncheon-table had not been fought to a definite finish, and the question was how far Lady Anne was in a mood to renew or forgo hostilities. Her pose in the armchair by the tea-table was rather elaborately rigid; in the gloom of a December afternoon Egbert's pince-nez did not materially help him to discern the expression of her face.

By way of breaking whatever ice might be floating on the surface he made a remark about a dim religious light. He or Lady Anne were accustomed to make that remark between 4.30 and 6 on winter and late autumn evenings; it was a part of their married life. There was no recognised rejoinder to it, and Lady Anne made none.

Don Tarquinio lay astretch on the Persian rug, basking in the firelight with superb indifference to the possible ill-humour of Lady Anne. His pedigree was as flawlessly Persian as the rug, and his ruff was coming into the glory of its second winter. The page-boy, who had Renaissance tendencies, had christened him Don Tarquinio. Left to themselves, Egbert and Lady Anne would unfailingly have called him Fluff, but they were not obstinate.

Egbert poured himself out some tea. As the silence gave no sign of breaking on Lady Anne's initiative, he braced himself for another Yermak effort.

"My remark at lunch had a purely academic application," he announced; "you seem to put an unnecessarily personal significance into it."

Lady Anne maintained her defensive barrier of silence. The bullfinch lazily filled in the interval with an air from *Iphigénie en Tau-*

ride. Egbert recognised it immediately, because it was the only air the bullfinch whistled, and he had come to them with the reputation for whistling it. Both Egbert and Lady Anne would have preferred something from *The Yeomen of the Guard*, which was their favourite opera. In matters artistic they had a similarity of taste. They leaned towards the honest and explicit in art, a picture, for instance, that told its own story, with generous assistance from its title. A riderless warhorse with harness in obvious disarray, staggering into a courtyard full of pale swooning women, and marginally noted "Bad News," suggested to their minds a distinct interpretation of some military catastrophe. They could see what it was meant to convey, and explain it to friends of duller intelligence.

The silence continued. As a rule Lady Anne's displeasure became articulate and markedly voluble after four minutes of introductory muteness. Egbert seized the milk-jug and poured some of its contents into Don Tarquinio's saucer; as the saucer was already full to the brim an unsightly overflow was the result. Don Tarquinio looked on with a surprised interest that evanesced into elaborate unconsciousness when he was appealed to by Egbert to come and drink up some of the spilt matter. Don Tarquinio was prepared to play many *rôles* in life, but a vacuum carpet-cleaner was not one of them.

"Don't you think we're being rather foolish?" said Egbert cheerfully.

If Lady Anne thought so she didn't say so.

"I dare say the fault has been partly on my side," continued Egbert, with evaporating cheerfulness. "After all, I'm only human, you know. You seem to forget that I'm only human."

He insisted on the point, as if there had been unfounded suggestions that he was built on Satyr lines, with goat continuations where the human left off.

The bullfinch recommenced its air from *Iphigénie en Tauride*. Egbert began to feel depressed. Lady Anne was not drinking her tea. Perhaps she was feeling unwell. But when Lady Anne felt unwell she was not wont to be reticent on the subject. "No one knows what I suffer from indigestion" was one of her favourite statements; but the lack of knowledge can only have been caused by defective listening; the amount of information available on the subject would have supplied material for a monograph.

Evidently Lady Anne was not feeling unwell.

Egbert began to think he was being unreasonably dealt with; naturally he began to make concessions.

"I dare say," he observed, taking as central a position on the hearthrug as Don Tarquinio could be persuaded to concede him, "I may have been to blame. I am willing, if I can thereby restore things to a happier standpoint, to undertake to lead a better life."

He wondered vaguely how it would be possible. Temptations came to him, in middle age, tentatively and without insistence, like a neglected butcher-boy who asks for a Christmas box in February for no more hopeful reason than that he didn't get one in December. He had no more idea of succumbing to them than he had of purchasing the fish-knives and fur boas that ladies are impelled to sacrifice through the medium of advertisement columns during twelve months of the year. Still, there was something impressive in this unasked-for renunciation of possibly latent enormities.

Lady Anne showed no sign of being impressed.

Egbert looked at her nervously through his glasses. To get the worst of an argument with her was no new experience. To get the worst of a monologue was a humiliating novelty.

"I shall go and dress for dinner," he announced in a voice into which he intended some shade of sternness to creep.

At the door a final access of weakness impelled him to make a further appeal.

"Aren't we being very silly?"

"A fool" was Don Tarquinio's mental comment as the door closed on Egbert's retreat. Then he lifted his velvet forepaws in the air and leapt lightly on to a bookshelf immediately under the bullfinch's cage. It was the first time he had seemed to notice the bird's existence, but he was carrying out a long-formed theory of action with the precision of mature deliberation. The bullfinch, who had fancied himself something of a despot, depressed himself of a sudden into a third of his normal displacement; then he fell to a helpless wing-beating and shrill cheeping. He had cost twenty-seven shillings without the cage, but Lady Anne made no sign of interfering. She had been dead for two hours.

G. K. CHESTERTON

(1874–)

GILBERT KEITH CHESTERTON was born in London, and received his education at St. Paul's School and the Slade School of Art. He began his literary career by reviewing books on art, and has since achieved fame as a novelist, playwright, poet, essayist, and critic. Not his least noteworthy work consists of his essays on Charles Dickens, and introductions to his books.

"The Invisible Man," from *The Innocence of Father Brown* (1911), is reprinted by kind permission of the author, Messrs. Cassell and Co., Ltd., and Messrs. Dodd, Mead and Co., Inc.

THE INVISIBLE MAN

IN the cool blue twilight of two steep streets in Camden Town, the shop at the corner, a confectioner's, glowed like the butt of a cigar. One should rather say, perhaps, like the butt of a firework, for the light was of many colours and some complexity, broken up by many mirrors and dancing on many gilt and gaily coloured cakes and sweetmeats. Against this one fiery glass were glued the noses of many guttersnipes, for the chocolates were all wrapped in those red and gold and green metallic colours which are almost better than chocolate itself; and the huge white wedding-cake in the window was somehow at once remote and satisfying, just as if the whole North Pole were good to eat. Such rainbow provocations could naturally collect the youth of the neighbourhood up to the ages of ten or twelve. But this corner was also attractive to youth at a later stage; and a young man, not less than twenty-four, was staring into the same shop window. To him, also, the shop was of fiery charm, but this attraction was not wholly to be explained by chocolates; which, however, he was far from despising.

He was a tall, burly, red-haired young man, with a resolute face but a listless manner. He carried under his arm a flat, grey portfolio of black-and-white sketches, which he had sold with more or less success to publishers ever since his uncle (who was an admiral) had disinherited him for Socialism, because of a lecture which he had delivered against that economic theory. His name was John Turnbull Angus.

Entering at last, he walked through the confectioner's shop into the back room, which was a sort of pastry-cook restaurant, merely raising his hat to the young lady who was serving there. She was a dark, elegant, alert girl in black, with a high colour and very quick, dark eyes; and after the ordinary interval she followed him into the inner room to take his order.

His order was evidently a usual one. "I want, please," he said with precision, "one halfpenny bun and a small cup of black coffee." An instant before the girl could turn away he added, "Also, I want you to marry me."

The young lady of the shop stiffened suddenly, and said, "Those are jokes I don't allow."

The red-haired young man lifted grey eyes of an unexpected gravity.

"Really and truly," he said, "it's as serious—as serious as the halfpenny bun. It is expensive, like the bun; one pays for it. It is indigestible, like the bun. It hurts."

The dark young lady had never taken her dark eyes off him, but seemed to be studying him with almost tragic exactitude. At the end of her scrutiny she had something like the shadow of a smile, and she sat down in a chair.

"Don't you think," observed Angus, absently, "that it's rather cruel to eat these halfpenny buns? They might grow up into penny buns. I shall give up these brutal sports when we are married."

The dark young lady rose from her chair and walked to the window, evidently in a state of strong but not unsympathetic cogitation. When at last she swung round again with an air of resolution she was bewildered to observe that the young man was carefully laying out on the table various objects from the shop-window. They included a pyramid of highly coloured sweets, several plates of sandwiches; and the two decanters containing that mysterious port and sherry which are peculiar to pastry-cooks. In the middle of this neat arrangement he had carefully let down the enormous load of white sugared cake which had been the huge ornament of the window.

"What on earth are you doing?" she asked.

"Duty, my dear Laura," he began.

"Oh, for the Lord's sake, stop a minute," she cried, "and don't talk to me in that way. I mean, what is all that?"

"A ceremonial meal, Miss Hope."

"And what is *that?*" she asked impatiently, pointing to the mountain of sugar.

"The wedding-cake, Mrs. Angus," he said.

The girl marched to that article, removed it with some clatter, and put it back in the shop window; she then returned, and, putting her elegant elbows on the table, regarded the young man not unfavourably but with considerable exasperation.

"You don't give me any time to think," she said.

"I'm not such a fool," he answered; "that's my Christian humility."

She was still looking at him; but she had grown considerably graver behind the smile.

"Mr. Angus," she said steadily, "before there is a minute more of this nonsense I must tell you something about myself as shortly as I can."

"Delighted," replied Angus. "You might tell me something about myself, too, while you are about it."

"Oh, do hold your tongue and listen," she said. "It's nothing that I'm ashamed of, and it isn't even anything that I'm specially sorry about. But what would you say if there were something that is no business of mine and yet is my nightmare?"

"In that case," said the man seriously, "I should suggest that you bring back the cake."

"Well, you must listen to the story first," said Laura, persistently.

"To begin with, I must tell you that my father owned the inn called the 'Red Fish' at Ludbury, and I used to serve people in the bar."

"I have often wondered," he said, "why there was a kind of a Christian air about this one confectioner's shop."

"Ludbury is a sleepy, grassy little hole in the Eastern Counties, and the only kind of people who ever came to the 'Red Fish' were occasional commercial travellers, and for the rest, the most awful people you can see, only you've never seen them. I mean little, loungy men, who had just enough to live on and had nothing to do but lean about in barrooms and bet on horses, in bad clothes that were just too good for them. Even these wretched young rotters were not very common at our house; but there were two of them that were a lot too common—common in every sort of way. They both lived on money of their own, and were wearisomely idle and overdressed. But yet I was a bit sorry for them, because I half believe they slunk into our little empty bar because each of them had a slight deformity; the sort of thing that some yokels laugh at. It wasn't exactly a deformity either; it was more an oddity. One of them was a surprisingly small man, something like a dwarf, or at least like a jockey. He was not at all jockeyish to look at, though; he had a round black head and a well-trimmed black beard, bright eyes like a bird's; he jingled money in his pockets; he jangled a great gold watch chain; and he never turned up except dressed just too much like a gentleman to be one. He was no fool though, though a futile idler; he was curiously clever at all kinds of things that couldn't be the slightest use; a sort of impromptu conjuring; making fifteen matches set fire to each other like a regular firework; or cutting a banana or some such thing into a dancing doll. His name was Isidore Smythe; and I can see him still, with his little dark face, just coming up to the counter, making a jumping kangaroo out of five cigars.

"The other fellow was more silent and more ordinary; but somehow he alarmed me much more than poor little Smythe. He was very tall and slight, and light-haired; his nose had a high bridge, and he might almost have been handsome in a spectral sort of way; but he had one of the most appalling squints I have ever seen or heard of. When he looked straight at you, you didn't know where you were yourself, let alone what he was looking at. I fancy this sort of disfigurement embittered the poor chap a little; for while Smythe was ready to show off his monkey tricks anywhere, James Welkin (that was the squinting man's name) never did anything except soak in our bar parlour, and go for great walks by himself in the flat, grey country all round. All the same, I think Smythe, too, was a little sensitive about being so small, though he carried it off more smartly. And so it was that I was really puzzled, as well as startled, and very sorry, when they both offered to marry me in the same week.

"Well, I did what I've since thought was perhaps a silly thing. But, after all, these freaks were my friends in a way; and I had a horror of their thinking I refused them for the real reason, which was that they were so impossibly ugly. So I made up some gas of another sort, about never meaning to marry anyone who hadn't carved his way in the world. I said it was a point of principle with me not to live on money that was just inherited like theirs. Two days after I had talked in this well-meaning sort of way, the whole trouble began. The first thing I heard was that both of them had gone off to seek their fortunes, as if they were in some silly fairy tale.

"Well, I've never seen either of them from that day to this. But I've had two letters from the little man called Smythe, and really they were rather exciting."

"Ever heard of the other man?" asked Angus.

"No, he never wrote," said the girl, after an instant's hesitation. "Smythe's first letter was simply to say that he had started out walking with Welkin to London; but Welkin was such a good walker that the little man dropped out of it, and took a rest by the roadside. He happened to be picked up by some travelling show, and, partly because he was nearly a dwarf, and partly because he was really a clever little wretch, he got on quite well in the show business, and was soon sent up to the Aquarium, to do some tricks that I forget. That was his first letter. His second was much more of a startler, and I only got it last week."

The man called Angus emptied his coffee-cup and regarded her with mild and patient eyes. Her own mouth took a slight twist of laughter as she resumed, "I suppose you've seen on the hoardings all about this 'Smythe's Silent Service'? Or you must be the only person that hasn't. Oh, I don't know much about it, it's some clockwork invention for doing all the housework by machinery. You know the sort of thing: 'Press a Button—A Butler Who Never Drinks.' 'Turn a Handle—Ten Housemaids Who Never Flirt.' You must have seen the advertisements. Well, whatever these machines are, they are making pots of money; and they are making it all for that little imp whom I knew down in Ludbury. I can't help feeling pleased the poor little chap has fallen on his feet; but the plain fact is, I'm in terror of his turning up any minute and telling me he's carved his way in the world—as he certainly has."

"And the other man?" repeated Angus with a sort of obstinate quietude.

Laura Hope got to her feet suddenly. "My friend," she said, "I think you are a witch. Yes, you are quite right. I have not seen a line of the other man's writing; and I have no more notion than the dead of what or where he is. But it is of him that I am frightened. It is he who is all about my path. It is he who has half driven me mad. Indeed, I think he has driven me mad; for I have felt him where he could not have been, and I have heard his voice when he could not have spoken."

"Well, my dear," said the young man, cheerfully, "if he were Satan himself, he is done for now you have told somebody. One goes mad all alone, old girl. But when was it you fancied you felt and heard our squinting friend?"

"I heard James Welkin laugh as plainly as I hear you speak," said the girl, steadily. "There was nobody there, for I stood just outside the shop at the corner, and could see down both streets at once. I had forgotten how he laughed, though his laugh was as odd as his squint. I had not thought of him for nearly a year. But it's a solemn truth that a few seconds later the first letter came from his rival."

"Did you ever make the spectre speak or squeak, or anything?" asked Angus, with some interest.

Laura suddenly shuddered, and then said, with an unshaken voice, "Yes. Just when I had finished reading the second letter from Isidore Smythe announcing his success, just then, I heard Welkin say, 'He shan't have you, though.' It was quite plain, as if he were in the room. It is awful; I think I must be mad."

"If you really were mad," said the young man, "you would think you must be sane. But certainly there seems to me to be something a little rum about this unseen gentleman. Two heads are better than one—I spare you allusions to any other organs—and really, if you would allow me, as a sturdy, practical man, to bring back the wedding-cake out of the window——"

Even as he spoke, there was a sort of steely shriek in the street outside, and a small motor, driven at devilish speed, shot up to the door of the shop and stuck there. In the same flash of time a small man in a shiny top hat stood stamping in the outer room.

Angus, who had hitherto maintained hilarious ease from motives of mental hygiene, revealed the strain of his soul by striding abruptly out of the inner room and confronting the newcomer. A glance at him was quite sufficient to confirm the savage guesswork of a man in love. This very dapper but dwarfish figure, with the spike of black beard carried insolently forward, the clever unrestful eyes, the neat but very nervous fingers, could be none other than the man just described to him: Isidore Smythe, who made dolls out of banana skins and match-boxes; Isidore Smythe, who made millions out of undrinking butlers and unflirting housemaids of metal. For a moment the two men, instinctively understanding each other's air of possession, looked at each other with that curious cold generosity which is the soul of rivalry.

Mr. Smythe, however, made no allusion to the ultimate ground of their antagonism, but said simply and explosively, "Has Miss Hope seen that thing on the window?"

"On the window?" repeated the staring Angus.

"There's no time to explain other things," said the small millionaire shortly. "There's some tomfoolery going on here that has to be investigated."

He pointed his polished walking-stick at the window, recently depleted by the bridal preparations of Mr. Angus; and that gentleman was astonished to see along the front of the glass a long strip of paper pasted, which had certainly not been on the window when he had looked through it some time before. Following the energetic Smythe outside into the street, he found that some yard and a half of stamp paper had been carefully gummed along the glass outside, and on this was written in straggly characters, "If you marry Smythe, he will die."

"Laura," said Angus, putting his big red head into the shop, "you're not mad."

"It's the writing of that fellow Welkin," said Smythe gruffly. "I haven't seen him for years, but he's always bothering me. Five times in the last fortnight he's had threatening letters left at my flat, and I can't even find out who leaves them, let alone if it is Welkin himself. The porter of the flats swears that no suspicious characters have been seen, and here he has pasted up a sort of dado on a public shop window, while the people in the shop——"

"Quite so," said Angus modestly, "while the people in the shop were having tea. Well, sir, I can assure you I appreciate your common sense in dealing so directly with the matter. We can talk about other things afterwards. The fellow cannot be very far off yet, for I swear there was no paper there when I went last to the window, ten or fifteen minutes ago. On the other hand, he's too far off to be chased, as we don't even know the direction. If you'll take my advice, Mr. Smythe, you'll put this at once in the hands of some energetic inquiry man, private rather than public. I know an extremely clever fellow, who has set up in business five minutes from here in your car. His name's Flambeau, and though his youth was a bit stormy, he's a strictly honest man now, and his brains are worth money. He lives in Lucknow Mansions, Hampstead."

"That is odd," said the little man, arching his black eyebrows. "I live, myself, in Himalaya Mansions, round the corner. Perhaps you might care to come with me; I can go to my rooms and sort out these queer Welkin documents, while you run round and get your friend the detective."

"You are very good," said Angus politely. "Well, the sooner we act the better."

Both men, with a queer kind of impromptu fairness, took the same sort of formal farewell of the lady, and both jumped into the brisk little car. As Smythe took the handles and they turned the great corner of the street, Angus was amused to see a gigantesque poster of "Smythe's Silent Service," with a picture of a huge headless iron doll, carrying a saucepan with the legend, "A Cook Who Is Never Cross."

"I use them in my own flat," said the little black-bearded man, laughing, "partly for advertisement, and partly for real convenience. Honestly, and all above board, those big clockwork dolls of mine do bring you coals or claret or a time-table quicker than any live servants I've ever known, if you know which knob to press. But I'll never deny, between ourselves, that such servants have their disadvantages, too."

"Indeed?" said Angus; "is there something they can't do?"

"Yes," replied Smythe coolly; "they can't tell me who left those threatening letters at my flat."

The man's motor was small and swift like himself; in fact, like his domestic service, it was of his own invention. If he was an advertising quack, he was one who believed in his own wares. The sense of something tiny and flying was accentuated as they swept up long white curves of road in the dead but open daylight of evening. Soon the white curves came sharper and dizzier; they were upon ascending spirals, as they say in the modern religions. For, indeed, they were cresting a corner of London which is almost as precipitous as Edinburgh, if not quite so picturesque. Terrace rose above terrace, and the special tower of flats they sought, rose above them all to almost Egyptian height, gilt by the level sunset. The change, as they turned the corner and entered the crescent known as Himalaya Mansions, was as abrupt as the opening of a window; for they found that pile of flats sitting above London as above a green sea of slate. Opposite to the mansions, on the other side of the gravel crescent, was a bushy enclosure more like a steep hedge or dyke than a garden, and some way below that ran a strip of artificial water, a sort of canal, like the moat of that embowered fortress. As the car swept round the crescent it passed, at one corner, the stray stall of a man selling chestnuts; and right away at the other end of the curve, Angus could see a dim blue policeman walking slowly. These were the only human shapes in that high suburban solitude; but he had an irrational sense that they expressed the speechless poetry of London. He felt as if they were figures in a story.

The little car shot up to the right house like a bullet, and shot out its owner like a bombshell. He was immediately inquiring of a tall commissionaire in shining braid, and a short porter in shirt sleeves, whether anybody or anything had been seeking his apartments. He was assured that nobody and nothing had passed these officials since his last inquiries; whereupon he and the slightly bewildered Angus were shot up in the lift like a rocket, till they reached the top floor.

"Just come in for a minute," said the breathless Smythe. "I want to show you those Welkin letters. Then you might run round the corner and fetch your friend." He pressed a button concealed in the wall, and the door opened of itself.

It opened on a long, commodious anteroom, of which the only arresting features, ordinarily speaking, were the rows of tall half-human mechanical figures that stood up on both sides like tailors' dummies. Like tailors' dummies they were headless; and like tailors' dummies they had a handsome unnecessary humpiness in the shoulders, and a pigeon-breasted protuberance of chest; but barring this, they were not much more like a human figure than any automatic machine at a station that is about the human height. They had two great hooks like arms, for carrying trays; and they were painted pea-green, or vermilion, or black for convenience of distinction; in every other way they were only automatic machines and nobody would have looked twice at them. On this occasion, at least, nobody did. For between the two rows of these domestic dummies lay something more interesting than most of the mechanics of the world. It was a white, tattered scrap of paper scrawled with red ink; and the agile inventor had snatched it up almost as soon as the door flew open. He handed it to Angus without a word. The red ink on it actually was not dry, and the message ran, "If you have been to see her to-day, I shall kill you."

There was a short silence, and then Isidore Smythe said quietly, "Would you like a little whisky? I rather feel as if I should."

"Thank you; I should like a little Flambeau," said Angus, gloomily. "This business seems to me to be getting rather grave. I'm going round at once to fetch him."

"Right you are," said the other, with admirable cheerfulness. "Bring him here as quick as you can."

But as Angus closed the front door behind him he saw Smythe push back a button, and one of the clockwork images glided from its place and slid along a groove in the floor carrying a tray with siphon and decanter. There did seem something a trifle weird about leaving the little man alone among those dead servants, who were coming to life as the door closed.

Six steps down from Smythe's landing the man in shirt sleeves was doing something with a pail. Angus stopped to extract a promise, fortified with a prospective bribe, that he would remain in that place until the return with the detective, and would keep count of any kind of stranger coming up those stairs. Dashing down to the front hall he then laid similar charges of vigilance on the commissionaire at the front door, from whom he learned the simplifying circumstance that there was no back door. Not content with this, he captured the floating policeman and induced him to stand opposite the entrance and watch it; and finally paused an instant for a pennyworth of chestnuts, and an inquiry as to the probable length of the merchant's stay in the neighbourhood.

The chestnut seller, turning up the collar of his coat, told him he should probably be moving shortly, as he thought it was going to snow. Indeed, the evening was growing grey and bitter, but Angus, with all his eloquence, proceeded to nail the chestnut man to his post.

"Keep yourself warm on your own chestnuts," he said earnestly. "Eat up your whole stock; I'll make it worth your while. I'll give you a sovereign if you'll wait here till I come back, and then tell me whether any man, woman, or child has gone into that house where the commissionaire is standing."

He then walked away smartly, with a last look at the besieged tower.

"I've made a ring round that room, anyhow," he said. "They can't all four of them be Mr. Welkin's accomplices."

Lucknow Mansions were, so to speak, on a lower platform of that hill of houses, of which Himalaya Mansions might be called the peak. Mr. Flambeau's semi-official flat was on the ground floor, and presented in every way a marked contrast to the American machinery and cold hotel-like luxury of the flat of the Silent Service. Flambeau, who was a friend of Angus, received him in a rococo artistic den behind his office, of which the ornaments were sabres, harquebuses, Eastern curiosities, flasks of Italian wine, savage cooking-pots, a plumy Persian cat, and a small dusty-looking Roman Catholic priest, who looked particularly out of place.

"This is my friend Father Brown," said Flambeau. "I've often wanted you to meet him. Splendid weather, this; a little cold for Southerners like me."

"Yes, I think it will keep clear," said Angus, sitting down on a violet-striped Eastern ottoman.

"No," said the priest quietly, "it has begun to snow."

And, indeed, as he spoke, the first few flakes, foreseen by the man of chestnuts, began to drift across the darkening windowpane.

"Well," said Angus heavily, "I'm afraid I've come on business, and rather jumpy business at that. The fact is, Flambeau, within a stone's throw of your house is a fellow who badly wants your help; he's perpetually being haunted and threatened by an invisible enemy—a scoundrel whom nobody has even seen." As Angus proceeded to tell the whole tale of Smythe and Welkin, beginning with Laura's story, and going on with his own, the supernatural laugh at the corner of two empty streets, the strange distinct words spoken in an empty room, Flambeau grew more and more vividly concerned, and the little priest seemed to be left out of it, like a piece of furniture. When it came to the scribbled stamp-paper pasted on the window, Flambeau rose, seeming to fill the room with his huge shoulders.

"If you don't mind," he said, "I think you had better tell me the rest on the nearest road to this man's house. It strikes me, somehow, that there is no time to be lost."

"Delighted," said Angus, rising also, "though he's safe enough for the present, for I've set four men to watch the only hole to his burrow."

They turned out into the street, the small priest trundling after them with the docility of a small dog. He merely said, in a cheerful way, like one making conversation, "How quick the snow gets thick on the ground."

As they threaded the steep side streets already powdered with silver Angus finished his story; and by the time they reached the crescent with the towering flats, he had leisure to turn his attention to the four sentinels. The chestnut seller, both before and after receiving a sovereign, swore stubbornly that he had watched the door and seen no visitor enter. The policeman was even more emphatic. He said he had had experience of crooks of all kinds, in top hats and in rags; he wasn't so green as to expect suspicious characters to look suspicious; he looked out for anybody, and, so help him, there had been nobody. And when all three men gathered round the gilded commissionaire, who still stood smiling astride of the porch, the verdict was more final still.

"I've got a right to ask any man, duke or dustman, what he wants in these flats," said the genial and gold-laced giant, "and I'll swear there's been nobody to ask since this gentleman went away."

The unimportant Father Brown, who stood back, looking modestly at the pavement, here ventured to say meekly, "Has nobody been up and downstairs, then, since the snow began to fall? It began while we were all round at Flambeau's."

"Nobody's been in here, sir, you can take it from me," said the official, with beaming authority.

"Then I wonder what that is?" said the priest, and stared at the ground blankly like a fish.

The others all looked down also; and Flambeau used a fierce exclamation and a French gesture. For it was unquestionably true that down the middle of the entrance guarded by the man in gold lace, actually between the arrogant, stretched legs of that colossus, ran a stringy pattern of grey footprints stamped upon the white snow.

"God!" cried Angus involuntarily, "the Invisible Man!"

Without another word he turned and dashed up the stairs, with Flambeau following; but Father Brown still stood looking about him in the snow-clad street as if he had lost interest in his query.

Flambeau was plainly in a mood to break down the door with his big shoulder; but the Scotsman, with more reason, if less intuition, fumbled about on the frame of the door till he found the invisible button; and the door swung slowly open.

It showed substantially the same serried interior; the hall had grown darker, though it was still struck here and there with the last crimson shafts of sunset, and one or two of the headless machines had been moved from their places for this or that purpose, and stood here and there about the twilit place. The green and red of their coats were all darkened in the dusk; and their likeness to human shapes slightly increased by their very shapelessness. But in the middle of them all, exactly where the paper with the red ink had lain, there lay something that looked very like red ink spilt out of its bottle. But it was not red ink.

With a French combination of reason and violence Flambeau simply said "Murder!" and, plunging into the flat, had explored every corner and cupboard of it in five minutes. But if he expected to find a corpse he found none. Isidore Smythe simply was not in the place, either dead or alive. After the most tearing search the two men met each other in the outer hall, with streaming faces and staring eyes. "My friend," said Flambeau, talking French in his excitement, "not only is your murderer invisible, but he makes invisible also the murdered man."

Angus looked round at the dim room full of dummies, and in some Celtic corner of his Scotch soul a shudder started. One of the life-size dolls stood immediately overshadowing the blood stain, summoned, perhaps, by the slain man an instant before he fell. One of the high-shouldered hooks that served the thing for arms was a little lifted, and Angus had suddenly the horrid fancy that poor Smythe's own iron child had struck him down. Matter had rebelled, and these machines had killed their master. But even so, what had they done with him?

"Eaten him?" said the nightmare at his ear; and he sickened for an instant at the idea of rent, human remains absorbed and crushed into all that acephalous clockwork.

He recovered his mental health by an emphatic effort, and said to Flambeau, "Well, there it is. The poor fellow has evaporated like a cloud and left a red streak on the floor. The tale does not belong to this world."

"There is only one thing to be done," said Flambeau, "whether it belongs to this world or the other, I must go down and talk to my friend."

They descended, passing the man with the pail, who again asseverated that he had let no intruder pass, down to the commissionaire and the hovering chestnut man, who rigidly reasserted their own watchfulness. But when Angus looked round for his fourth confirmation he could not see it, and called out with some nervousness, "Where is the policeman?"

"I beg your pardon," said Father Brown; "that is my fault. I just sent him down the road to investigate something—that I thought worth investigating."

"Well, we want him back pretty soon," said Angus abruptly, "for the wretched man upstairs has not only been murdered, but wiped out."

"How?" asked the priest.

"Father," said Flambeau, after a pause, "upon my soul I believe it is more in your department than mine. No friend or foe has entered the house, but Smythe is gone, as if stolen by the fairies. If that is not supernatural, I——"

As he spoke they were all checked by an unusual sight; the big blue policeman came round the corner of the crescent, running. He came straight up to Brown.

"You're right, sir," he panted, "they've just found poor Mr. Smythe's body in the canal down below."

Angus put his hand wildly to his head. "Did he run down and drown himself?" he asked.

"He never came down, I'll swear," said the constable, "and he wasn't drowned either, for he died of a great stab over the heart."

"And yet you saw no one enter?" said Flambeau in a grave voice.

"Let us walk down the road a little," said the priest.

As they reached the other end of the crescent he observed abruptly, "Stupid of me! I forgot to ask the policeman something. I wonder if they found a light brown sack."

"Why a light brown sack?" asked Angus.

"Because if it was any other coloured sack, the case must begin over again," said Father Brown; "but if it was a light brown sack, why, the case is finished."

"I am pleased to hear it," said Angus with hearty irony. "It hasn't begun, so far as I am concerned."

"You must tell us all about it," said Flambeau with a strange heavy simplicity, like a child.

Unconsciously they were walking with quickening steps down the long sweep of road on the other side of the high crescent, Father Brown leading briskly, though in silence. At last he said with an almost touching vagueness, "Well, I'm afraid you'll think it so prosy. We always begin at the abstract end of things, and you can't begin this story anywhere else.

"Have you ever noticed this—that people never answer what you say? They answer what you mean—or what they think you mean. Suppose one lady says to another in a country house, 'Is anybody staying with you?' the lady doesn't answer 'Yes; the butler, the three footmen, the parlour-maid, and so on,' though the parlour-maid may be in the room, or the butler behind her chair. She says, 'There is *nobody* staying with us,' meaning nobody of the sort you mean. But suppose a doctor inquiring into an epidemic asks, 'Who is staying in the house?' then the lady will remember the butler, parlour-maid, and the rest. All language is used like that; you never get a question answered literally, even when you get it answered truly. When those four quite honest men said that no man had gone into the Mansions, they did not really mean that *no man* had gone into them. They meant no man whom they could suspect of being your man. A man did go into the house, and did come out of it, but they never noticed him.

"An invisible man?" inquired Angus, raising his red eyebrows.

"A mentally invisible man," said Father Brown.

A minute or two after he resumed in the same unassuming voice, like a man thinking his way. "Of course, you can't think of such a man, until you do think of him. That's where his cleverness comes in. But I came to think of him through two or three little things in the tale Mr. Angus told us. First, there was the fact that this Welkin went for long walks. And then there was the vast lot of stamp paper on the window. And then, most of all, there were the two things the young lady said—things that couldn't be true. Don't get annoyed," he added hastily, noting a sudden movement of the Scotsman's head; "she thought they were true all right, but they couldn't be true. A person *can't* be quite alone in a street a second before she receives a letter. She can't be quite alone in a street when she starts reading a letter just received. There must be somebody pretty near her; he must be mentally invisible."

"Why must there be somebody near her?" asked Angus.

"Because," said Father Brown, "barring carrier-pigeons, somebody must have brought her the letter."

"Do you really mean to say," asked Flambeau, "that Welkin carried his rival's letters to his lady?"

"Yes," said the priest. "Welkin carried his rival's letters to his lady. You see, he had to."

"Oh, I can't stand much more of this," exploded Flambeau. "Who is this fellow? What does he look like? What is the usual get-up of a mentally invisible man?"

"He is dressed rather handsomely in red, blue and gold," replied the priest promptly with precision, "and in this striking, and even showy, costume he entered Himalaya Mansions under eight human eyes; he killed Smythe in cold blood, and came down into the street again carrying the dead body in his arms——"

"Reverend sir," cried Angus, standing still, "are you raving mad, or am I?"

"You are not mad," said Brown, "only a little unobservant. You have not noticed such a man as this, for example."

He took three quick strides forward, and put his hand on the shoulder of an ordinary passing postman who had bustled by them unnoticed under the shade of the trees.

"Nobody ever notices postmen somehow," he said thoughtfully; "yet they have passions like other men, and even carry large bags where a small corpse can be stowed quite easily."

The postman, instead of turning naturally, had ducked and tumbled against the garden fence. He was a lean fair-bearded man of very ordinary appearance, but as he turned an alarmed face over his shoulder, all three men were fixed with an almost fiendish squint.

Flambeau went back to his sabres, purple rugs and Persian cat, having many things to attend to. John Turnbull Angus went back to the lady at the shop, with whom that imprudent young man contrives to be extremely comfortable. But Father Brown walked those snow-covered hills under the stars for many hours with a murderer, and what they said to each other will never be known.

RAFAEL SABATINI

(1875–   )

RAFAEL SABATINI is acclaimed a master of romantic fiction. He commenced his literary life with *The Tavern Knight* (1904), and two years later published *Bardelys the Magnificent*. Among his other works of fiction are *The Historical Nights' Entertainment* (1918–9), *Scaramouche* (1921), and *Captain Blood* (1922). He is also the author of *The Life of Cæsar Borgia* (1912), and *Torquemada and the Spanish Inquisition* (1913). He has written several plays, and several of his novels have been filmed.

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THE GHOST OF TRONJOLLY

TRONJOLLY'S meeting with M. de Saint André took place in the courtyard of the Bouc Inn at Strasbourg as they were both about to mount the *diligence* for Paris. It was marked by courtesies of which Saint André was the initiator. There was such grace, such an air of the *beau monde*, such a charm about the manner with which he fell back in deference and waved the other to precede him to a seat on the vehicle that Tronjolly's *bourgeois* soul was stirred to similar and quite unusual politeness.

Not that Tronjolly was by any means a boor. He was a good-natured, amiable young man; of a rather clumsy habit of body, it is true, but of a good-humoured, frank, and kindly countenance. If he was a little awkward in his manners and slow to those courtesies which are as natural as the breath of life in the world of fashion, it is because the world of fashion was not his world. He was the son of an exceedingly prosperous Strasbourg merchant, reared in a *bourgeois* atmosphere with the neglect of everything that did not make for efficiency in the counting-house. To Tronjolly the elder the countinghouse was the world that mattered, the making of money was life. He did not know anything of any other life, and had he known it, there can be no doubt that he would have despised it. In these religious convictions—for they amounted to nothing less—had he reared his eldest son. And if his eldest son was now being dispatched to Paris that there he might marry a lady whom he had never seen, you are not to suppose from this that any such unprofitable matter as romance was in question. The whole affair had been settled, terms discussed, charges adjusted, by correspondence like any other ledger transaction; and our rather lumpish, amiable young friend was going to Paris to marry an heiress.

The ostler stood back from the horses, the postilion's whip cracked, and, with cries of "*Gare! Gare!*" the *diligence* swept out of the yard and started upon its journey. Tronjolly permitted himself to take admiring stock of the graceful and gracious travelling companion who occupied the outside seat beside him. He considered him carefully from top to toe, and mentally—from force of habit—estimated his outward worth. There was his laced hat, the furred *roque-laure* of bottle-green cloth in which our gentleman wrapped his long, shapely body against the crisp air of that bright autumnal day, the long black knee boots of fine leather, the jewel glittering in the snowy ruffles at his neck, the costly lace that fell over his gloved hands, the small sword with its hilt of mother-o'-pearl and silver. Tronjolly was profoundly impressed by the sum total of his calculations, which even then did not include, as he remembered, the sleek valet who sat behind in charge of the gentleman's abundant luggage.

They made an odd contrast, these two—Tronjolly, who had been reared in the ways of making money, and Saint André, who had been reared in the ways of spending it; Tronjolly to whom life was serious and gloomy, and Saint André, to whom it was a jest, an adventure to be relished. Much of an age and much of a height, with a good deal even that was similar in cast of countenance, yet in build they compared as a greyhound to a mastiff. Saint André wore his own hair carefully dressed and tied into a cue with long ribbons of black watered silk; Tronjolly affected a bagwig of an antiquated type.

Turning his head presently, his eyes drawn by the other's scrutiny: "Do you travel far, monsieur?" inquired Saint André, in pleasant, level tones.

For a moment Tronjolly was flung into confusion, so that he reddened and stammered. When he recovered he replied that he was on his way to Paris.

M. de Saint André's face lighted up, conveying the flattering intimation that he was pleased.

"In that case, monsieur, we shall be travelling companions all the way," he said.

Tronjolly received the news in a silence which endured some moments, until it occurred to him that it would become him to profess himself enchanted—which he did.

"Do you—do you know Paris, monsieur?" he stammered.

"Know it?" Saint André's fine eyebrows were raised. Then he laughed. "I was a student at the Sorbonne for three years, and what a Sorbonne student does not know of Paris, my friend——"

He shrugged and laughed again, leaving his sentence there.

In this manner began an acquaintance which was to improve considerably during the tedious six days of that journey.

Tronjolly, finding himself out in the world for the first time, was a little bewildered, very lonely, and very ill at ease. He soon became conscious that he lacked the proper manners towards all those—ostlers, chamberlains, postilions, drawers, landlords, and the rest—whose business it was to minister to travellers. He was mortally afraid of being swindled, and almost as afraid of being ridiculous.

Then, too, in answer to his anxious questions, Saint André told him things about Paris which went far to increase his natural timidity, and to fill him with dread at the very thought of finding himself alone in such an ocean of guile and wickedness. He even began to fear Monsieur Coupri, the father of the heiress he was going to wed. Not a doubt but that Monsieur Coupri and the family would make him welcome. Yet it was not as if he knew them or they knew him, and any unknown quantity connected with Paris began to assume formidable and terrifying proportions to Tronjolly.

Now, it is not in the nature of a Tronjolly to carry such a burden, when confession to an amiable and worldly-wise companion will partially relieve it. Hence followed confidences, at first faltering and hesitant, then—being encouraged—full and frank.

Tronjolly entertained M. de St. André with a full relation of his circumstances towards the Coupri family, of the marriage that had been arranged between himself and Mdlle. Coupri, and of the lady's very substantial dowry.

"Monsieur," said Saint André, "if the lady's beauty at all matches her other endowments, you are a singularly fortunate fellow."

"As to that," said Tronjolly, pouting and raising one shoulder, "I just take my chance. I am assured that she is sound and healthy, and not without charm. But where the rest is so extremely satisfactory one must not be too expectant as to details. As I have said, I take my chance."

"And you may take it with a good heart," laughed the man of the world. "All marriage is a lottery, as someone has said, and you are fortunate in your knowledge that the essentials are assured."

"You are not married yourself, by chance, monsieur?" wondered Tronjolly.

"I?" Saint André laughed. "My friend, I am a younger son with a patrimony too slender to suffice for my own abnormally developed habits of expenditure. And then, too, I am cursed with fastidiousness—a madness in a poor man. My family had proposed to marry me to a gargoyle of a woman—a heavily gilded gargoyle, I admit, with a title and lands and rent-roll as long as a lawsuit. But—what would you?—I declined on the ground that, as I have not the means to build a cathedral, I should not know what to do with a gargoyle. My father has no sense of humour, and my answer gave offence. People are like that. At present I am more or less in disgrace, and I am going to Paris to forget it, and to get away from my father. He is not an adorable man at the best of times, but when he is offended he is detestable."

Confidence inviting confidence, Tronjolly told Saint André of his own father, and of his family generally, and thus the intimacy between them grew apace.

Paris was reached in the twilight of the sixth day of their journey. The *diligence* drew up at the Golden Hand, at the corner of the Rue de la Verrière, and if Tronjolly was a little bewildered by the bustle in the yard of that notable hostelry, he was profoundly impressed, awed almost, to hear Bercy—M. de Saint André's valet—issuing orders for their accommodation to the chamberlain in a tone so surly that very soon there was as much scurry and confusion at the Golden Hand as if a prince of the blood had alighted there.

A suite of splendid apartments was placed at their disposal, and presently they dined in a blue-and-gold room above-stairs, of a splendour such as Tronjolly had never known. They were waited upon by the sleekest of servants, under the instructions of the capable Bercy. The supper was to Tronjolly a succession of incredible sensations, a succession of discoveries in what could be achieved with ordinary fish and flesh; and it was washed down by a well-ripened, soft, velvety Armagnac which burst into incredible perfumes upon the palate, and left Tronjolly persuaded that until this hour he had never tasted wine.

Coming from Strasbourg, as he did, he was well acquainted with that epicurean paste that is made from fattened goose liver. But it had required Paris and the chef at the Golden Hand to show him to what unimagined uses it could be applied. There was a dish of boned quails —unfathomable mystery—stuffed tight with that toothsome paste. Tronjolly, by nature a glutton, ate six of those stuffed birds, with the consequence that he was taken ill in the night, and, after writhing in pain on his magnificent, canopied bed, he screamed, and rang for assistance.

A little later, M. de Saint André was awakened by a grave-faced physician, who informed him that Tronjolly was seriously ill, and asked was he related to the sufferer.

"Not at all, monsieur," said Saint André.

"You are his friend, at least?"

"You may call me that. We were travelling companions from Strasbourg."

"He has no relations in Paris?" was the next question.

"From what he tells me of himself, he has none."

The doctor clucked in vexation.

"Your friend is in very grave case. He is suffering from a very remorseless form of gastric inflammation. Had his relatives been at hand, I should have advised you to summon them."

Saint André sat up in bed.

"Do you mean that his life is in danger?" he cried in horrified astonishment.

The physician spread his hands.

"I will do what I can," he said. "But I doubt if he will be alive in the morning."

The event proved how much his fears were justified. Tronjolly spent the night in delirium. Towards dawn, in a fleeting moment of lucidity, he found Saint André in a bedgown beside him, and realised something of his circumstances.

"I am very ill, am I not?" he inquired.

"You are certainly ill, my friend."

Tronjolly considered.

"They are expecting me to-morrow—M. Coupri and mademoiselle," he said. "Should I be unable to go, you will send word to them, will you not?"

"I will bear them word myself," Saint André promised.

The unfortunate youth died a few hours later, and M. de Saint André, profoundly troubled by the event, spent the greater part of the morning in making arrangements for the funeral. Having completed these, he remembered that the Coupri family would be awaiting the bridegroom, and determined to go at once upon his grim errand. He ordered a carriage, and went forth dressed as he was, in his travelling suit and bottle-green *roquelaure.*

The carriage clattered over the Pont au Change, and on through a maze of narrow streets to the more spacious Rue du Foin. It rolled along beside the high wall of a garden, and came at last to rest before the rather imposing house to which the garden belonged.

M. de Saint André alighted, and rapped sharply on the green door with the gold knob of his cane. It opened almost instantly, and a female servant, with a comely smiling face and almost devouring eyes, confronted our fine gentleman expectantly.

"Monsieur Coupri lives here, I think," said Saint André.

"Yes, monsieur."

The maid was almost breathless.

"May one see him? I have just arrived from Strasbourg, and——"

But he got no further. With a ripple of laughter, the girl turned and sped away from him into the house, calling:

"Monsieur! Monsieur Coupri! It is he! He has arrived. He is here!"

"Pst! Pst! Hi! My good girl!" Saint André called after her in vexation.

But in her excitement she either did not hear or did not heed him. And then a door flew open, and a stout little man rolled out. He had a rosy, good-humoured face and twinkling little eyes. He exuded *bonhomie* at every pore.

Before Saint André could utter a word of protest, the little man had bounded forward, and descended upon him like an avalanche, embraced him, kissed him upon both cheeks, and dragged him across the threshold by main force, smothering him the while in volubility.

"But come in, then. I was wagering it would be you when the carriage stopped. You see it was the hour, and I knew that the son of my old friend Tronjolly would be as punctual as his father. Be welcome to my house, my child. The ladies are waiting to make you welcome, too, and Geneviève is dying of impatience to see you. Did you have a good journey? It is a plaguey long way to Strasbourg, and on such an errand the journey must have seemed long indeed. Youth's impatience!" The little man laughed with a will. "Youth's impatience!"

"Ah, but one moment, monsieur!" cried Saint André, disengaging himself from the other's clinging arms. "I haven't——"

"To be sure—the carriage," said M. Coupri. "But Mariette will see to it. Pay him, Mariette," he bade the grinning domestic. "And give him a *pourboire* of six sous. Open-handedness is the order of such a day as this, eh? We do not get married every day, do we, Georges?"

"Monsieur," said Saint André gravely, "there is a very important matter——"

"To be sure there is," cried Coupri. "The ladies are waiting, which is not at all gallant of us."

He flung open the door of the little *salon* on the right, and disclosed the elegant, graceful M. de Saint André to the eyes of a dozen people assembled there in expectation.

There was a moment's silence, which M. de Saint André realised was a tribute to his personality, to his fine clothes, and his air of the great world, which made an impression upon the Coupri family very different from that which the family had expected to receive.

Then an elderly but still attractive lady, whom Coupri presented as Aunt Jeanne, sailed forward, flung her arms round Saint André's neck, and kissed him resoundingly. After that Saint André accepted the part which destiny forced upon him. It was characteristic of him that he should abandon himself recklessly to the adventure, without thought of anything beyond the amusement which the moment promised. He suffered himself meekly to be embraced and kissed by every *bourgeoise* present, and one or two of the *bourgeoises* made the ordeal quite worth while, he thought. All called him Georges—which name he thought detestable—and all bade him welcome, with one exception. This was a young man in the uniform of an officer of the Swiss Guards, who gave himself airs on the strength of his military rank in a notoriously plebeian corps, and who held himself scowlingly aloof from M. de Saint André.

The family commented with *bourgeoise* frankness on Saint André's fine clothes, on his height, on his manner; they confessed what they had expected him to be like, and pronounced themselves to be pleasantly surprised by what they beheld.

At this mention of a portrait, Saint André became uneasy and the uneasiness grew with Coupri's next words.

"Do you know now," said Coupri, "that I find him singularly unlike his picture. I had expected him to be stouter, and to have more colour."

"I was stouter and I had more colour," said Saint André, "but I have been ill."

"Ill?" It was a chorus of concern. They crowded round him. "Ill?" they clamoured.

"Oh, but I am quite recovered now. Though, of course, the fatigue of the journey, and—and my impatience consuming me——"

Peals of laughter acclaimed the gallantry of this speech. Then Aunt Jeanne's voice was heard.

"But come here, Geneviève. Come, then, and greet your bridegroom. Do you hear what he is saying?"

From a corner of the room, whither she had fled like some frightened bird, Aunt Jeanne dragged the bride forward. Fresh from her convent, wrapped in her purity and innocence, white and lovely as a budding rose, she stood before our gentleman, long lashes veiling the fear in her blue eyes.

Saint André stared in surprise a moment; then, recovering, bowed very gracefully. Geneviève replied with a curtsy, then sidled to her aunt for cover and protection.

Conversation broke out on all sides, and the young officer of Swiss, who had watched the meeting of the betrothed with lowering eyes, now begged Coupri to present him to the bridegroom. Coupri did so, announcing the Swiss as a cousin, and left them together.

"Your manners, sir," said the officer, "are precisely what one would expect from a Strasbourg shopkeeper!"

Saint André was taken aback. But he recovered instantly.

"Just as yours, sir," he murmured, smiling sweetly, "are those of a Swiss cowherd!"

It was the officer's turn to be taken aback by the other's promptitude. He stiffened, and clicked his heels together.

"My name," he said, "is Stoffel."

"An unpleasant name," said Saint André, "but no doubt you deserve it."

Stoffel's eyes narrowed. His thin lips smiled grimly.

"I see that we understand one another," he said, keeping his voice lowered. "And I am glad to see that you wear a sword."

"I bought it cheap in a second-hand shop in Strasbourg," Saint André apologised, feeling that his entertainment promised to be more complete than he had expected.

"Can you use it?" growled the Swiss.

"You might show me how," ventured Saint André.

Stoffel leaned nearer, and spoke rapidly.

"In the garden, then, at five o'clock this evening."

He would have moved away, but Saint André caught him by the sleeve of his red coat.

"A moment, *mon lieutenant*," he begged. "Would it be impertinent to inquire what may be your quarrel with me?"

The fire-eater sneered at him.

"You arrive inopportunely, that is all," he said. "You were rash to leave Strasbourg."

Then Aunt Jeanne approached, leading forward the shy Geneviève, and followed by Coupri. An ill-bred, inquisitive silence fell upon the company, and Stoffel drew away.

"Let us leave the betrothed to become better acquainted," purred Coupri, rubbing his hands.

"Leave them!" echoed Aunt Jeanne on a note of horror.

She had notions of propriety above the level of those of her brother.

"Bah!" said Coupri, peremptorily brushing aside all objections. "We dine in a quarter of an hour, Georges. Geneviève will entertain you until then. Come, my friends."

They departed, Stoffel going last, his powdered head very much in the air.

Alone with her future husband, Geneviève sat down abruptly, without looking at him. Saint André did not feel exactly at ease, and began to regret the adventure. There was an awkward silence, broken at last by mademoiselle.

"You had a good journey, monsieur?" she asked mechanically.

"A—an impatient journey, mademoiselle," said he.

She flushed, and tapped her foot. Apparently there was no lack of spirit behind the air of convent-bred simplicity.

"You said that before, I think."

"A truthful man is bound to repeat himself," said Saint André. "Have patience with my lack of wit. Forgive it on the score of my sincerity."

"Sincerity!" she echoed. She flashed him a glance, and positively sneered. "You are sincere? It is sincere to imply that you were impatient to come and marry a girl you had never seen?"

Saint André was at a loss for once in his impudent life.

"There—there is such a thing as intuition, mademoiselle," he explained lamely.

"Yes, monsieur. And, of course, in your case, so far as my dowry was concerned, there was even more—there was definite knowledge. That would account for your impatience. I had not thought of it."

Saint André went down on one knee beside her and sought to take her hand, what time he prepared a likely speech. But she snatched the hand away.

"I am not yet your wife," she reminded him. "The transaction is not yet complete. Delivery of the goods does not take place until this evening."

His speech perished unborn.

"Mademoiselle, you are very cruel," he protested.

"I am neither kind nor cruel. I am nothing," she said with crimsoning cheeks. "I am just a bale of merchandise that your father and mine have marketed between them."

He rose awkwardly, brushing his knees. Decidedly the adventure did not run the course he had expected.

"Is it—is it impossible that we should love each other?" he asked her.

And he confessed afterwards that in that moment he was sincere, for this dainty child with the unsuspected spirit perturbed him most unusually.

"Quite impossible!" said she, tightening her red lips.

He sighed.

"Impossible that you should love me—that I can understand." His voice throbbed with melancholy feeling. "But that I should love you. Oh, mademoiselle, a little mercy, I implore you! I could serve you all the days of my life with increasing joy and happiness in the service."

It was a speech that moved her. She looked at him almost shyly. Saw him standing there, his head bowed in dejection, and observed, for the first time, what a very handsome head it was.

"Alas, monsieur, you come too late for love!" said she.

"Too late!" he echoed, and then he understood. "Stoffel!" he cried.

Her cheeks flamed.

"Stoffel," she admitted. "We love each other. I tell you this because I think I like you. You are not as uncouth as I had expected."

"I understand, mademoiselle," he answered, with a tinge of bitterness, "that I cannot hold the lists against a Swiss mercenary."

"I warn you, sir, that Stoffel has sworn to me that this marriage contract never shall be signed."

Saint André became extremely angry. But before he exploded, Coupri entered to summon them to dinner.

For a while Saint André sat moody and silent. Wounded in his vanity, deeply compromised, a duel on his hands with a Swiss fire-eater who had sworn to kill him, he had abundant matter for reflection, and began to wonder how the Tronjolly, whom he had impersonated, would have acquitted himself in such unexpected circumstances; whether indeed, he were not to be envied at rest in his coffin.

Presently, however, the wine doing its work, his volatile nature reasserted itself, and he became the very life of the feast. The more he talked, and the more lively became the sparkle of his ready wit, the more sullen grew Stoffel, who scowled upon him across the table. Geneviève watched and listened in amazement and a growing wonder. He began to feel pleased with himself. The adventure went none so badly after all. Nevertheless it was high time to end it.

Observing that the company began to grow torpid with excessive indulgence, Saint André proposed to take the air in the garden for some moments. Coupri offered to accompany him, but Saint André protested that he desired to be alone, to collect himself against the coming of the notary and the signing of the contract.

Halfway down the garden he became conscious that someone was following him. Over his shoulder he caught a glimpse of a red coat, and, cursing his pursuer, he quickened his steps towards the door in the wall which led to the street and safety. He reached it to find it locked, and the key missing. With a stifled oath, he turned and faced the hurrying Stoffel.

"You are forgetting an appointment, I think," said the Swiss, smiling terribly.

"On the contrary, I was remembering it," said Saint André.

"So indeed I might have supposed, knowing your rabbit-hearted kind."

Saint André was amused and a little angry.

"I thought that was the source of your valour," he said.

"What's that?"

"I'll tell you. You are a man practised in arms, and you take advantage of that fact to browbeat and to impose your will upon an unoffending, rabbit-hearted *bourgeois* who scarcely knows point from pummel."

Stoffel, standing stiffly as a fencing-master, went red and white by turns.

"I do not force you to fight, monsieur," he said. "You may withdraw if you please."

"But I no longer please," said Saint André, unsheathing his small sword. "You have deliberately detained me, and you shall take the consequences. When I go, I shall carry away the only honourable thing about you. At your pleasure, monsieur."

In a rage, the Swiss threw off his wig and his red coat, whipped out his sword, and, with a bellowed, "On guard!" flung himself upon the supposed Strasbourg merchant. He was met by a guard that was like a wall of iron and for some moments nothing was heard but the *click-click* of their blades.

Saint André knew Stoffel's kind, and had not expected much. He found even less than he had expected. He laughed.

"Come, come, sir!" he mocked. "Is this the best that you can do? And against a rabbit-hearted *bourgeois?* Then here's to make an end."

There was a slither of steel, a sharp blow of forte on foible, a sudden wrench, and the Swiss officer stood disarmed and white as a corpse.

Smiling and calm, Saint André bowed to him.

"Another time, *mon lieutenant*," he said, "make certain about the rabbit heart, or they may mourn you in the Cantons."

He picked up the fallen weapon, sheathed his own, and, bowing again, was departing.

"Give me back my sword!" cried Stoffel suddenly in a choking voice.

Saint André paused and turned. He was very grave.

"If I do, monsieur, we recommence; and if we recommence the ending may be different."

The lieutenant clenched his hands, then, with an oath, flung aside and picked up his coat and wig. It is disconcerting, when you happen to be a fire-eater, to meet a *bourgeois* who can play such tricks with you.

Saint André walked back towards the house. Midway he met Geneviève. She was very pale, and had been hurrying. At sight of him she turned paler, and stood still.

"Where is Monsieur Stoffel?" she cried.

"Engaged at the moment in swallowing his mortification," said the gentle Saint André. "Otherwise he has suffered no damage. I have brought you his sword. You may like to return it to him as a wedding gift, though, if you really love him, you may think twice about it, for I assure you that the weapon is a greater danger to himself than to anyone else."

He bowed again, and left her gazing after him somewhat foolishly, Stoffel's sword in her hands. On the threshold of the house he encountered Coupri, who hailed him with the news that the notary was expected at six o'clock with the marriage contract.

Saint André pulled out his watch.

"I am afraid I cannot wait, monsieur," he said.

"What's that?" quoth Coupri.

"You must excuse me, monsieur," he said, faltering a little, in agony almost. "But I have a most important engagement to fulfil."

Coupri's face expressed surprise.

"To-day?" he asked incredulously.

"At once, monsieur," said Saint André.

"But—but——" Coupri stared. "In less than an hour the notary will be here. Your engagement must keep, my friend."

"Unfortunately, my engagement cannot keep," Saint André insisted.

"But what on earth is it?"

In his despair, Saint André's audacity returned, and he invented boldly.

"What I have to say may no doubt surprise you, monsieur; but, since you insist, you shall know. I arrived here last night at dusk, and I put up at the Golden Hand, in the Rue de la Verrière. At supper I ate so many stuffed quails that in the night I was seized with cramps.

A doctor was sent for, who found me to be suffering from a grave internal disorder, of which I died at five o'clock this morning. My funeral takes place at six o'clock this evening, and that, monsieur, is the appointment that I must keep. You will understand its utter urgency."

Wide-eyed, open-mouthed, Coupri stared at him for a long moment; then he began to laugh. But his laughter withered before the other's solemnity. He became uneasy, and peered at his proposed son-in-law.

"You are not, by any chance——"

He touched his forehead significantly.

"I feared that you might think so, monsieur. Let me assure you that I am not mad. I am just dead. Adieu, monsieur!"

"A moment, sir!" roared Coupri.

But Saint André waited for no more. He slipped past Coupri, picked up his hat and cloak in the hall, and was gone from the house so quickly that by the time Coupri came panting to the door there was no sign of him.

He went back to the others and roared out the tale of what had taken place.

"Perhaps——" began Aunt Jeanne; and stopped abruptly, a scared look in her eyes.

"Perhaps what?" roared Coupri.

"Suppose you go to the Golden Hand and make inquiries?" his brother suggested.

Adopting the suggestion, Coupri bellowed for his hat and cane, and set out at once, accompanied by his brother and by Stoffel, the latter in a simmer of vindictiveness.

At the Golden Hand, M. Coupri demanded the landlord.

"Did a Monsieur Tronjolly alight here last evening from the Strasbourg *diligence?*" he inquired.

The landlord's face became extremely grave.

"Monsieur Tronjolly?" he replied. "Yes, that is so. It is true that he alighted here."

Something in his tone and manner filled them with vague premonitions.

"And where is he now?" inquired Coupri.

"Alas! messieurs, the unfortunate gentleman was taken ill in the night, and, although everything possible was done, he succumbed to gastric inflammation some hours later. They are burying him at the Père-la-Chaise at six o'clock this evening."

Three shaking, pale-faced men returned to the pleasant house in the Rue du Foin with the dreadful story that a ghost had sat with them that day—a story which spread rapidly and made no little stir at the time. And it is not until now that the memoirs of that amusing M. de

Saint André have been discovered, that we are afforded the truth of the mysterious affair of the Ghost of Tronjolly.

Whether the lieutenant of Swiss was able to persuade mademoiselle that he could not be blamed for the disgrace to his sword, seeing that his opponent was a supernatural one, and whether, once the Tronjolly wedding was definitely out of the question, he was able to persuade Coupri to allow him to become his son-in-law, are matters, unfortunately, not now discoverable.

A. E. COPPARD

(1877–)

ALFRED EDGAR COPPARD came into notice with *Adam and Eve and Pinch Me*, published when he was forty-four. Since, he has issued, among other works, *Clorinda Walks in Heaven* (1922) and *Fishmonger's Fiddle* (1925). Besides short stories, he has written poetry, *Hips and Haws* (1922), *Pelagea and Other Poems* (1926), and *Collected Poems* (1928).

"Fifty Pounds," from *The Field of Mustard* (1926), is reprinted by kind permission of the author.

FIFTY POUNDS

AFTER tea Philip Repton and Eulalia Burnes discussed their gloomy circumstances. Repton was the precarious sort of London journalist, a dark deliberating man, lean and drooping, full of genteel unprosperity, who wrote articles about *Single Tax*, *Diet and Reason*, *The Futility of this, that and the other*, or *The Significance of the other, that and this;* all done with a bleak care and signed P. Stick Repton. Eulalia was brown-haired and hardy, undeliberating and intuitive; she had been milliner, clerk, domestic help, and something in a canteen; and P. Stick Repton had, as one commonly says, picked her up at a time when she was drifting about London without a penny in her purse, without even a purse, and he had not yet put her down.

"I can't understand! It's sickening, monstrous!" Lally was fumbling with a match before the penny gas fire, for when it was evening, in September, it always got chilly on a floor so high up. Their flat was a fourth-floor one and there were—Oh, fifteen thousand stairs! Out of the window and beyond the chimneys you could see the long glare from lights in High Holborn, and hear the hums and hoots of buses. And that was a comfort.

"Lower! Turn it lower!" yelled Philip. The gas had ignited with an astounding thump; the kneeling Lally had thrown up her hands and dropped the matchbox, saying "Damn" in the same tone as one might say good morning to a milkman.

"You shouldn't do it, you know," grumbled Repton. "You'll blow us to the deuce." And that was just like Lally, that was Lally all over, always: the gas, the nobs of sugar in his tea, the way she . . . and the, the . . . Oh, dear, dear! In their early life together, begun so abruptly and illicitly six months before, her simple hidden beauties had delighted him by their surprises; they had peered and shone brighter, had waned and recurred; she was less the one star in his universe than a faint galaxy.

This room of theirs was a dingy room, very small but very high. A lanky gas tube swooped from the middle of the ceiling towards the middle of the tablecloth as if burning to discover whether that was pink or saffron or fawn—and it *was* hard to tell—but on perceiving that the cloth, whatever its tint, was disturbingly spangled with dozens of cup-stains and several large envelopes, the gas tube in the violence of its disappointment contorted itself abruptly, assumed a lateral bend, and put out its tongue of flame at an oleograph of Mona Lisa which hung over the fireplace.

Those envelopes were the torment to Lally; they were the sickening, monstrous manifestations which she could not understand. There were always some of them lying there, or about the room, bulging with manuscripts that no editors—they *couldn't* have perused them—wanted; and so it had come to the desperate point when, as Lally was saying, something had to be done about things. Repton had done all *he* could; he wrote unceasingly, all day, all night, but all his projects insolvently withered, and morning, noon, and evening brought his manuscripts back as unwanted as snow in summer. He was depressed and baffled and weary. And there was simply nothing else he could do, nothing in the world. Apart from his own wonderful gift he was useless, Lally knew, and he was being steadily and stupidly murdered by those editors. It was weeks since they had eaten a proper meal. Whenever they obtained any real nice food now, they sat down to it silently, intently, and destructively. As far as Lally could tell there seemed to be no prospect of any such meals again in life or time, and the worst of it all was Philip's pride—he was actually too proud to ask anyone for assistance! Not that he would be too proud to accept help if it were offered to him: Oh, no, if it came he would rejoice at it! But still, he had that nervous shrinking pride that coiled upon itself, and he would not ask; he was like a wounded animal that hid its woe far away from the rest of the world. Only Lally knew his need, but why could not other people see it—those villainous editors! His own wants were so modest and he had a generous mind.

"Phil," Lally said, seating herself at the table. Repton was lolling in a wicker armchair beside the gas fire. "I'm not going on waiting and waiting any longer, I must go and get a job. Yes, I must. We get poorer and poorer. We can't go on like it any longer, there's no use, and I can't bear it."

"No, no, I can't have that, my dear. . . ."

"But I will!" she cried. "Oh, why are you so proud?"

"Proud! Proud!" He stared into the gas fire, his tired arms hanging limp over the arms of the chair. "You don't understand. There are things the flesh has to endure, and things the spirit too must endure. . . ." Lally loved to hear him talk like that; and it was just as well, for Repton was much given to such discoursing. Deep in her mind was the conviction that he had simple access to profound, almost unimaginable, wisdom. "It isn't pride, it is just that there is a certain order in life, in my life, that it would not do for. I could not bear it, I could never rest: I can't explain that, but just believe it, Lally." His head was empty but unbowed; he spoke quickly and finished almost angrily. "If only I had money! It's not for myself. I can stand all this, any amount of it. I've done so before, and I shall do again and again, I've no doubt. But I have to think of you."

That was fiercely annoying. Lally got up and went and stood over him.

"Why are you so stupid? I can think for myself and fend for myself. I'm not married to you. You have your pride, too. I'm a burden to you. If you won't let me work now while we're together, then I must leave you and work for myself."

"Leave! Leave me now? When things are so bad?" His white face gleamed his perturbation up at her. "Oh, well, go, go." But then, mournfully moved, he took her hands and fondled them. "Don't be a fool, Lally; it's only a passing depression, this; I've known worse before, and it never lasts long, something turns up, always does. There's a good and bad in it all, but there's more goodness than anything else. You see."

"I don't want to wait for ever, even for goodness. I don't believe in it, I never see it, never feel it, it is no use to me. I could go and steal, or walk the streets, or do any dirty thing—easily. What's the good of goodness if it isn't any use?"

"But, but," Repton stammered, "what's the use of bad, if it isn't any better?"

"I mean . . ." began Lally.

"You don't mean anything, my dear girl."

"I mean, when you haven't any choice it's no use talking moral, or having pride, it's stupid. Oh, my darling"—she slid down to him and lay against his breast—"it's not you, you are everything to me; that's why it angers me so, this treatment of you, all hard blows and no comfort. It will never be any different, I feel it will never be different now, and it terrifies me."

"Pooh!" Repton kissed her and comforted her: she was his beloved. "When things are wrong with us our fancies take their tone from our misfortunes, badness, evil. I sometimes have a queer stray feeling that one day I shall be hanged. Yes, I don't know what for, what *could* I be hanged for? And, do you know, at other times I've had a kind of intuition that one day I shall be—what do you think?—Prime Minister of the country! Yes, well, you can't reason against such things. I know what I should do, I've my plans, I've even made a list of the men for my Cabinet. Yes, well, there you are!"

But Lally had made up her mind to leave him; she would leave him for a while and earn her own living. When things took a turn for the better she would join him again. She told him this. She had friends who were going to get her some work.

"But what are you going to do, Lally, I . . ."

"I'm going away to Glasgow," said she.

"Glasgow?" He had heard things about Glasgow! "Good heavens!"

"I've some friends there," the girl went on steadily. She had got up and was sitting on the arm of his chair. "I wrote to them last week. They can get me a job almost any when, and I can stay with them. They want me to go—they've sent the money for my fare. I think I shall have to go."

"You don't love me then!" said the man.

Lally kissed him.

"But *do* you? Tell me!"

"Yes, my dear," said Lally, "of course."

An uneasiness possessed him; he released her moodily. Where was their wild passion flown to? She was staring at him intently, then she tenderly said: "My love, don't you be melancholy, don't take it to heart so. I'd cross the world to find you a pin."

"No, no, you mustn't do that," he exclaimed idiotically. At her indulgent smile he grimly laughed too, and then sank back in his chair. The girl stood up and went about the room doing vague nothings, until he spoke again.

"So you are tired of me?"

Lally went to him steadily and knelt down by his chair. "If I was tired of you, Phil, I'd kill myself."

Moodily he ignored her. "I suppose it had to end like this. But I've loved you desperately." Lally was now weeping on his shoulder, and he began to twirl a lock of her rich brown hair absently with his fingers as if it were a seal on a watch chain. "I'd been thinking we might as well get married, as soon as things had turned round."

"I'll come back, Phil"—she clasped him so tenderly—"as soon as you want me."

"But you are not really going?"

"Yes," said Lally.

"You're not to go!"

"I wouldn't go if . . . if anything . . . if you had any luck. But as we are now I must go away, to give you a chance. You see that, darling Phil?"

"You're not to go; I object. I just love you, Lally, that's all, and of course I want to keep you here."

"Then what are we to do?"

"I . . . don't . . . know. Things drop out of the sky. But we must be together. You're not to go."

Lally sighed: he was stupid. And Repton began to turn over in his mind the dismal knowledge that she had taken this step in secret, she had not told him while she was trying to get to Glasgow. Now here she was with the fare, and as good as gone! Yes, it was all over.

"When do you propose to go?"

"Not for a few days, nearly a fortnight."

"Good God," he moaned. Yes, it was all over then. He had never dreamed that this would be the end, that she would be the first to break away. He had always envisaged a tender scene in which he could tell her, with dignity and gentle humour, that . . . Well, he never had quite hit upon the words he would use, but that was the kind of setting. And now, here she was with her fare to Glasgow, her heart turned towards Glasgow, and she as good as gone to Glasgow! No dignity, no gentle humour—in fact he was enraged—sullen but enraged; he boiled furtively. But he said with mournful calm:

"I've so many misfortunes, I suppose I can bear this, too." Gloomy and tragic he was.

"Dear, darling Phil, it's for your own sake I'm going."

Repton sniffed derisively. "We are always mistaken in the reasons for our commonest actions; Nature derides us all. You are sick of me; I can't blame you."

Eulalia was so moved that she could only weep again. Nevertheless she wrote to her friends in Glasgow promising to be with them by a stated date.

Towards the evening of the following day, at a time when she was alone, a letter arrived addressed to herself. It was from a firm of solicitors in Cornhill inviting her to call upon them. A flame leaped up in Lally's heart: it might mean the offer of some work which would keep her in London after all! If only it were so she would accept it on the spot, and Philip would have to be made to see the reasonability of it. But at the office in Cornhill a more astonishing outcome awaited her. There she showed her letter to a little office boy with scarcely any finger-nails and very little nose, and he took it to an elderly man who had a superabundance of both. Smiling affably, the long-nosed man led her upstairs into the sombre den of a gentleman who had some white hair and a lumpy yellow complexion. Having put to her a number of questions relating to her family history, and appearing to be satisfied and not at all surprised by her answers, this gentleman revealed to Lally the overpowering tidings that she was entitled to a legacy of eighty pounds by the will of a forgotten and recently deceased aunt. Subject to certain formalities, proofs of identity and so forth, he promised Lally the possession of the money within about a week.

Lally's descent to the street, her emergence into the clamouring atmosphere, her walk along to Holborn, were accomplished in a state of blessedness and trance, a trance in which life became a thousand times aerially enlarged, movement was a delight, and thought a rapture. She would give all the money to Philip, and if he very much wanted it she would even marry him now. Perhaps, though, she would save ten pounds of it for herself. The other seventy would keep them for . . . it was impossible to say how long it would keep them. They could have a little holiday somewhere in the country together, he was so worn and weary. Perhaps she had better not tell Philip anything at all about it until her lovely money was really in her hand. Nothing in life, at least nothing about money, was ever certain; something horrible might happen at the crucial moment and the money be snatched from her very fingers. Oh, she would go mad then! So for some days she kept her wonderful secret.

Their imminent separation had given Repton a tender sadness that was very moving. "Eulalia," he would say; for he had suddenly adopted the formal version of her name: "Eulalia, we've had a great time together, a wonderful time, there will never be anything like it again." She often shed tears, but she kept the grand secret still locked in her heart. Indeed, it occurred to her very forcibly that even now his stupid pride might cause him to reject her money altogether. Silly, silly Philip! Of course it would have been different if they had married; he would naturally have taken it then, and really, it would have *been* his. She would have to think out some dodge to overcome his scruples. Scruples were *such* a nuisance, but then it was very noble of him: there were not many men who wouldn't take money from a girl they were living with.

Well, a week later she was summoned again to the office in Cornhill and received from the white-haired gentleman a cheque for eighty pounds drawn on the Bank of England to the order of Eulalia Burnes.

Miss Burnes desired to cash the cheque straightway, so the large-nosed elderly clerk was deputed to accompany her to the Bank of England close by and assist in procuring the money.

"A very nice errand!" exclaimed that gentleman as they crossed to Threadneedle Street past the Royal Exchange. Miss Burnes smiled her acknowledgment, and he began to tell her of other windfalls that had been disbursed in his time—but vast sums, very great persons—until she began to infer that Blackbean, Carp, and Ransome were universal dispensers of heavenly largesse.

"Yes, but," said the clerk, hawking a good deal from an affliction of catarrh, "I never got any myself, and never will. If I did, do you know what I would do with it?" But at that moment they entered the portals of the bank, and in the excitement of the business, Miss Burnes forgot to ask the clerk how he would use the legacy, and thus she possibly lost a most valuable slice of knowledge. With one fifty-pound note and six five-pound notes clasped in her handbag she bade good-bye to the long-nosed clerk, who shook her fervently by the hand and assured her that Blackbean, Carp, and Ransome would be delighted at all times to undertake any commissions on her behalf. Then she fled along the pavement, blithe as a bird, until she was breathless with her flight. Presently she came opposite the window of a typewriting agency. Tripping airily into its office she laid a scrap of paper before a lovely Hebe who was typing there.

"I want this typed, if you please," said Lally.

The beautiful typist read the words on the scrap of paper and stared at the heiress.

"I don't want any address to appear," said Lally; "just a plain sheet, please."

A few moments later she received a neatly typed page folded in an envelope, and after paying the charge she hurried off to a District Messenger office. Here she addressed the envelope in a disguised hand to *P. Stick Repton, Esq.*, at their address in Holborn. She read the typed letter through again:

> Dear Sir:
>
> In common with many others I entertain the greatest admiration for your literary abilities, and I therefore beg you to accept this tangible expression of that admiration from a constant reader of your articles who, for purely private reasons, desires to remain anonymous.
>
> Your very sincere
> Wellwisher.

Placing the fifty-pound note upon the letter Lally carefully folded them together and put them both into the envelope. The attendant then gave it to a uniformed lad, who sauntered off whistling very casually, somewhat to Lally's alarm—he looked so small and careless to be entrusted with fifty pounds. Then Lally went out, changed one of her five-pound notes and had a lunch—half-a-crown, but it was worth it. Oh, how enchanting and exciting London was! In two days more she would have been gone: now she would have to write off at once to her Glasgow friends and tell them she had changed her mind, that she was now settled in London. Oh, how enchanting and delightful! And to-night he would take her out to dine in some fine restaurant, and they would do a theatre. She did not really want to marry Phil, they had got on so well without it, but if he wanted that too she did not mind—much. They would go away into the country for a whole week. What money would do! Marvellous! And looking round the restaurant she felt sure that no other woman there, no matter how well dressed, had as much as thirty pounds in her handbag.

Returning home in the afternoon she became conscious of her own betraying radiance; very demure and subdued and usual she would have to be, or he might guess the cause of it. Though she danced up the long flights of stairs, she entered their room quietly, but the sight of Repton staring out of the window, forlorn as a drowsy horse, overcame her and she rushed to embrace him, crying "Darling!"

"Hullo, hullo!" he smiled.

"I'm so fond of you, Phil, dear."

"But . . . but you're deserting me!"

"Oh, no," she cried archly; "I'm not—not deserting you."

"All right." Repton shrugged his shoulders, but he seemed happier. He did not mention the fifty pounds then: perhaps it had not come yet—or perhaps he was thinking to surprise her.

"Let's go for a walk, it's a screaming lovely day," said Lally.

"Oh, I dunno." He yawned and stretched. "Nearly tea-time, isn't it?"

"Well, we . . ." Lally was about to suggest having tea out somewhere, but she bethought herself in time. "I suppose it is. Yes, it is."

So they stayed in for tea. No sooner was tea over than Repton remarked that he had an engagement somewhere. Off he went, leaving Lally disturbed and anxious. Why had he not mentioned the fifty pounds? Surely it had not gone to the wrong address? This suspicion once formed, Lally soon became certain, tragically sure, that she had misaddressed the envelope herself. A conviction that she had put No. 17 instead of No. 71 was almost overpowering, and she fancied that she hadn't even put London on the envelope—but Glasgow. That was impossible, though, but—Oh, the horror!—somebody else was enjoying their fifty pounds. The girl's fears were not allayed by the running visit she paid to the messenger office that evening, for the rash imp who had been entrusted with her letter had gone home and therefore could not be interrogated until the morrow. By now she was sure that he had blundered; he had been so casual with an important letter like that! Lally never did, and never would again, trust any little boys who wore their hats so much on one side, were so glossy with hair-oil, and went about whistling just to madden you. She burned to ask where the boy lived, but in spite of her desperate desire she could not do so. She dared not, it would expose her to . . . to something or other she could only feel, not name; you had to keep cool, to let nothing, not even curiosity, master you.

Hurrying home again, though hurrying was not her custom, and there was no occasion for it, she wrote the letter to her Glasgow friends. Then it crossed her mind that it would be wiser not to post the letter that night. Better wait until the morning, after she had discovered what the horrible little messenger had done with her letter. Bed was a poor refuge from her thoughts, but she accepted it, and when Phil came home she was not sleeping. While he undressed he told her of the lecture he had been to, something about Agrarian Depopulation it was, but even after he had stretched himself beside her, he did not speak about the fifty pounds. Nothing, not even curiosity, should master her, and so she calmed herself, and in time fitfully slept.

At breakfast next morning he asked her what she was going to do that day.

"Oh," replied Lally offhandedly, "I've a lot of things to see to, you know; I must go out. I'm sorry the porridge is so awful this morning, Phil, but . . ."

"Awful?" he broke in. "But it's nicer than usual! Where are you going? I thought—our last day, you know—we might go out somewhere together."

"Dear Phil!" Lovingly she stretched out a hand to be caressed across the table. "But I've several things to do. I'll come back early, eh?" She got up and hurried round to embrace him.

"All right," he said. "Don't be long."

Off went Lally to the messenger office, at first as happy as a bird, but on approaching the building the old tremors assailed her. Inside the room was the cocky little boy, who bade her "Good morning" with laconic assurance. Lally at once questioned him, and when he triumphantly produced a delivery book she grew limp with her suppressed fear, one fear above all others. For a moment she didn't want to look at it: Truth hung by a hair, and as long as it so hung she might swear it was a lie. But there it was, written right across the page, an entry of a letter delivered, signed for in the well-known hand, *P. Stick Repton*. There was no more doubt, only a sharp indignant agony as if she had been stabbed with a dagger of ice.

"Oh, yes, thank you," said Lally calmly. "Did you hand it to him yourself?"

"Yes'm," replied the boy, and he described Philip.

"Did he open the letter?"

"Yes'm."

"There was no answer?"

"No'm."

"All right." Fumbling in her bag, she added: "I think I've got a sixpence for you."

Out in the street again she tremblingly chuckled to herself. "So that is what he is like, after all. Cruel and mean!" He was going to let her go and keep the money in secret to himself! How despicable! Cruel and mean, cruel and mean. She hummed it to herself: "Cruel and mean, cruel and mean!" It eased her tortured bosom. "Cruel and mean!" And he was waiting at home for her, waiting with a smile for their last day together. It would *have* to be their last day. She tore up the letter to her Glasgow friends, for now she *must* go to them. So cruel and mean! Let him wait! A 'bus stopped beside her and she stepped on to it, clinging to the top and sitting there while the air chilled her burning features. The 'bus made a long journey to Plaistow. She knew nothing of Plaistow, she wanted to know nothing of Plaistow, but she did not care where the 'bus took her; she only wanted to keep moving, and moving away, as far away as possible from Holborn and from him, and not once let those hovering tears down fall.

From Plaistow she turned and walked back as far as the Mile End Road. Thereabouts, wherever she went she met clergymen, dozens of them. There must be a conference, about charity or something, Lally thought. With a vague desire to confide her trouble to someone, she observed them; it would relieve the strain. But there was none she could tell her sorrow to, and failing that, when she came to a neat restaurant she entered it and consumed a fish. Just beyond her three sleek parsons were lunching, sleek and pink; bald, affable, consoling men, all very much alike.

"I saw Carter yesterday," she heard one say. Lally liked listening to the conversation of strangers, and she had often wondered what clergymen talked about among themselves.

"What, Carter! Indeed. Nice fellow, Carter. How was he?"

"Carter loves preaching, you know!" cried the third.

"Oh, yes, he loves preaching!"

"Ha, ha, ha, yes."

"Ha, ha, ha, oom."

"Awf'ly good preacher, though."

"Yes, awf'ly good."

"And he's awf'ly good at comic songs, too."

"Yes?"

"Yes!"

Three glasses of water, a crumbling of bread, a silence suggestive of prayer.

"How long has he been married?"

"Twelve years," returned the cleric who had met Carter.

"Oh, twelve years!"

"I've only been married twelve years myself," said the oldest of them.

"Indeed!"

"Yes, I tarried very long."

"Ha, ha, ha, yes."

"Ha, ha, ha, oom."

"Er . . . have you any family?"

"No."

Very delicate and dainty in handling their food they were; very delicate and dainty.

"My rectory is a magnificent old house," continued the recently married one. "Built originally 1700. Burnt down. Rebuilt 1784."

"Indeed!"

"Humph!"

"Seventeen bedrooms and two delightful tennis courts."

"Oh, well done!" the others cried, and then they all fell with genteel gusto upon a pale blancmange.

From the restaurant the girl sauntered about for a while, and then there was a cinema wherein, seated warm and comfortable in the twitching darkness, she partially stilled her misery. Some nervous fancy kept her roaming in that district for most of the evening. She knew that if she left it she would go home, and she did not want to go home. The naphtha lamps of the booths at Mile End were bright and distracting, and the hum of the evening business was good despite the smell. A man was weaving sweetstuffs from a pliant roll of warm toffee that he wrestled with as the athlete wrestles with the python. There were stalls with things of iron, with fruit or fish, pots and pans, leather, string, nails. Watches for use—or for ornament—what d'ye lack? A sailor told naughty stories while selling bunches of green grapes out of barrels of cork dust which he swore he had stolen from the Queen of Honolulu. People clamoured for them both. You could buy back numbers of the comic papers at four a penny, rolls of linoleum for very little more—and use either for the other's purpose.

"At thrippence per foot, mesdames," cried the sweating cheapjack, lashing himself into ecstatic furies, "that's a piece of fabric weft and woven with triple-strength Andalusian jute, double-hot pressed with rubber from the island of Pagama, and stencilled by an artist as poisoned his grandfather's cook. That's a piece of fabric, mesdames, as the king of heaven himself wouldn't mind to put down in his parlour—if he had a chance. Do I ask thrippence a foot for that piece of fabric? Mesdames, I was never a daring chap."

Lally watched it all, she looked and listened; then looked and did not see, listened and did not hear. Her misery was not the mere disappointment of love, not that kind of misery alone; it was the crushing of an ideal in which love had had its home, a treachery cruel and mean. The sky of night, so smooth, so bestarred, looked wrinkled through her screen of unshed tears; her sorrow was a wild cloud that troubled the moon with darkness.

In miserable desultory wandering she had spent her day, their last day, and now, returning to Holborn in the late evening, she suddenly began to hurry, for a new possibility had come to lighten her dejection. Perhaps, after all, so whimsical he was, he was keeping his "revelation" until the last day, or even the last hour, when (nothing being known to her, as he imagined) all hopes being gone and they had come to the last kiss, he would take her in his arms and laughingly kill all grief, waving the succour of a flimsy banknote like a flag of triumph. Perhaps even, in fact surely, that was why he wanted to take her out to-day! Oh, what a blind, wicked, stupid girl she was, and in a perfect frenzy of bubbling faith she panted homewards for his revealing sign.

From the pavement below she could see that their room was lit. Weakly she climbed the stairs and opened the door. Phil was standing up, staring so strangely at her. Helplessly and half-guilty she began to smile. Without a word said he came quickly to her and crushed her in his arms, her burning silent man, loving and exciting her. Lying against his breast in that constraining embrace, their passionate disaster was gone, her doubts were flown; all perception of the feud was torn from her and deeply drowned in a gulf of bliss. She was aware only of the consoling delight of their reunion, of his amorous kisses, of his tongue tingling the soft down on her upper lip that she disliked and he admired. All the soft wanton endearments that she so loved to hear him speak were singing in her ears, and then he suddenly swung and lifted her up, snapped out the gaslight, and carried her off to bed.

Life that is born on love feeds on love; if the wherewithal be hidden, how shall we stay our hunger? The galaxy may grow dim, or the stars drop in a wandering void; you can neither keep them in your hands nor crumble them in your mind.

What was it Phil had once called her? Numskull! After all it was his fifty pounds, she had given it to him freely, it was his to do as he liked with. A gift was a gift, it was poor spirit to send money to anyone with the covetous expectation that it would return to you. She would surely go to-morrow.

The next morning he awoke her early, and kissed her.

"Train!" Lally scrambled from his arms and out of bed.

A fine day, a glowing day. Oh, bright, sharp air! Quickly she dressed, and went into the other room to prepare their breakfast. Soon he followed, and they ate silently together, although whenever they were near each other he caressed her tenderly. Afterwards she went into the bedroom and packed her bag; there was nothing more to be done, he was beyond hope. No woman waits to be sacrificed, least of all those who sacrifice themselves with courage and a quiet mind. When she was ready to go she took her portmanteau into the sitting-room; he, too, made to put on his hat and coat.

"No," murmured Lally. "You're not to come with me."

"Pooh, my dear!" he protested; "nonsense."

"I won't have you come," cried Lally with an asperity that impressed him.

"But you can't carry that bag to the station by yourself!"

"I shall take a taxi." She buttoned her gloves.

"My dear!" His humorous deprecation annoyed her.

"Oh, bosh!" Putting her gloved hands around his neck she kissed him coolly. "Good-bye. Write to me often. Let me know how you thrive, won't you, Phil? And"—a little waveringly—"love me always." She stared queerly at the two dimples in his cheeks; each dimple was a nest of hair that could never be shaved.

"Lally, darling, beloved girl! I never loved you more than now, this moment. You are more precious than ever to me."

At that, she knew her moment of sardonic revelation had come—but she dared not use it, she let it go. She could not so deeply humiliate him by revealing her knowledge of his perfidy. A compassionate divinity smiles at our puny sins. She knew his perfidy, but to triumph in it would defeat her own pride. Let him keep his gracious, mournful airs to the last, false though they were. It was better to part so, better from such a figure than from an abject scarecrow, even though both were the same inside. And something capriciously reminded her, for a flying moment, of elephants she had seen swaying with the grand movement of tidal water—and groping for monkey-nuts.

Lally tripped down the stairs alone. At the end of the street she turned for a last glance. There he was, high up in the window, waving good-byes. And she waved back at him.

LORD DUNSANY

(1878–)

EDWARD JOHN MORETON DRAX PLUNKETT, 18th Baron Dunsany, was educated at Eton, and served both in the South African and European Wars, in the last-named being wounded. Despite strenuous hobbies, which include big-game shooting and hunting, he has found time to write books and plays, all touched with a mystic imagination and whimsical fancy that may, in some part, be attributed to his Irish ancestry.

"Chu-Bu and Sheemish," from *Tales of Wonder* (1916), is reprinted here by kind permission of the author and Messrs. Elkin Mathews and Marrot, Ltd.

CHU-BU AND SHEEMISH

IT was the custom on Tuesdays in the temple of Chu-Bu for the priests to enter at evening and chant, "There is none but Chu-Bu."

And all the people rejoiced and cried out, "There is none but Chu-Bu." And honey was offered to Chu-Bu, and maize and fat. Thus was he magnified.

Chu-Bu was an idol of some antiquity, as may be seen from the colour of the wood. He had been carved out of mahogany, and after he was carved he had been polished. Then they had set him up on the diorite pedestal with the brazier in front of it for burning spices and the flat gold plates for fat. Thus they worshipped Chu-Bu.

He must have been there for over a hundred years when one day the priests came in with another idol, into the temple of Chu-Bu, and set it up on a pedestal near Chu-Bu's and sang, "There is also Sheemish."

And all the people rejoiced and cried out, "There is also Sheemish."

Sheemish was palpably a modern idol, and although the wood was stained with a dark-red dye, you could see that he had only just been carved. And honey was offered to Sheemish as well as Chu-Bu, and also maize and fat.

The fury of Chu-Bu knew no time-limit; he was furious all that night, and next day he was furious still. The situation called for immediate miracles. To devastate the city with a pestilence and kill all his priests was scarcely within his power, therefore he wisely concentrated such divine powers as he had in commanding a little earthquake. "Thus," thought Chu-Bu, "will I reassert myself as the only god, and men shall spit upon Sheemish."

Chu-Bu willed it and willed it and still no earthquake came, when suddenly he was aware that the hated Sheemish was daring to attempt a miracle too. He ceased to busy himself about the earthquake and listened, or shall I say felt, for what Sheemish was thinking; for gods are aware of what passes in the mind by a sense that is other than any of our five. Sheemish was trying to make an earthquake too.

The new god's motive was probably to assert himself. I doubt if Chu-Bu understood or cared for his motive, it was sufficient for an idol already aflame with jealousy that his detestable rival was on the verge of a miracle. All the power of Chu-Bu veered round at once and set dead against an earthquake, even a little one. It was thus in the temple of Chu-Bu for some time, and then no earthquake came.

To be a god and to fail to achieve a miracle is a despairing sensation; it is as though among men one should determine upon a hearty sneeze and as though no sneeze should come; it is as though one should try to swim in heavy boots or remember a name that is utterly forgotten: all these pains were Sheemish's.

And upon Tuesday the priests came in, and the people, and they did worship Chu-Bu and offered fat to him, saying, "O Chu-Bu who made everything," and then the priests sang, "There is also Sheemish," and again the people rejoiced and cried out, "There is also Sheemish"; and Chu-Bu was put to shame and spake not for three days.

Now there were holy birds in the temple of Chu-Bu, and when the third day was come and the night thereof, it was as it were revealed to the mind of Chu-Bu, that there was dirt upon the head of Sheemish.

And Chu-Bu spake unto Sheemish as speak the gods, moving no lips nor yet disturbing the silence, saying, "There is dirt upon thy head, O Sheemish." All night long, he muttered again and again, "There is dirt upon Sheemish's head." And when it was dawn and voices were heard far off, Chu-Bu became exultant with Earth's awakening things, and cried out till the sun was high, "Dirt, dirt, dirt, upon the head of Sheemish," and at noon he said, "So Sheemish would be a god." Thus was Sheemish confounded.

And with Tuesday one came and washed his head with rose-water, and he was worshipped again when they sang "There is also Sheemish." And yet was Chu-Bu content, for he said, "The head of Sheemish has been defiled," and again, "His head was defiled, it is enough." And one evening, lo! there was dirt on the head of Chu-Bu also, and the thing was perceived of Sheemish.

It is not with the gods as it is with men. We are angry one with another and turn from our anger again, but the wrath of the gods is enduring. Chu-Bu remembered and Sheemish did not forget. They spake as we do not speak, in silence yet heard of each other, nor were their thoughts as our thoughts. We should not judge them by merely human standards. All night long they spake and all night said these words only: "Dirty Chu-Bu," "Dirty Sheemish." "Dirty Chu-Bu," "Dirty Sheemish," all night long. Their wrath had not tired at dawn, and neither had wearied of his accusation. And gradually Chu-Bu came to realise that he was nothing more than the equal of Sheemish. All gods are jealous, but this equality with the upstart Sheemish, a thing of painted wood a hundred years newer than Chu-Bu, and this worship given to Sheemish in Chu-Bu's own temple, were particularly bitter. Chu-Bu was jealous even for a god; and when Tuesday came again, the third day of Sheemish's worship, Chu-Bu could bear it no longer. He felt that his anger must be revealed at all costs, and he returned with all the vehemence of his will to achieving a little earthquake. The worshippers had just gone from his temple when Chu-Bu settled his will to attain this miracle; now and then his meditations were disturbed by the now familiar dictum, "Dirty Chu-Bu," but Chu-Bu willed ferociously, not even stopping to say what he longed to say and had already said nine hundred times, and presently even these interruptions ceased.

They ceased because Sheemish had returned to a project that he had never definitely abandoned, the desire to assert himself and exalt himself over Chu-Bu by performing a miracle, and the district being volcanic he had chosen a little earthquake as the miracle most easily accomplished by a small god.

Now an earthquake that is commanded by two gods has double the chance of fulfilment than when it is willed by one, and an incalculably greater chance than when two gods are pulling different ways; as, to take the case of older and greater gods, when the sun and the moon pull in the same direction we have the biggest tides.

Chu-Bu knew nothing of the theory of tides, and was too much occupied with his miracle to notice what Sheemish was doing. And suddenly the miracle was an accomplished thing.

It was a very local earthquake, for there are other gods than Chu-Bu or even Sheemish, and it was only a little one as the gods had willed, but it loosened some monoliths in a colonnade that supported one side of the temple and the whole of one wall fell in, and the low huts of the people of that city were shaken a little and some of their doors were jammed so that they would not open; it was enough, and for a moment it seemed that it was all; neither Chu-Bu nor Sheemish commanded there should be more, but they had set in motion an old law, older than Chu-Bu, the law of gravity that that colonnade had held back for a hundred years, and the temple of Chu-Bu quivered and then stood still, swayed once and was overthrown, on the heads of Chu-Bu and Sheemish.

No one rebuilt it, for nobody dared go near such terrible gods. Some said that Chu-Bu wrought the miracle, but some said Sheemish, and thereof schism was born; the weakly amiable, alarmed by the bitterness of rival sects, sought compromise and said that both had wrought it, but no one guessed the truth that the thing was done in rivalry.

And a saying arose, and both sects held this belief in common, that whoso toucheth Chu-Bu shall die or whoso looketh upon Sheemish.

That is how Chu-Bu came into my possession when I travelled once beyond the Hills of Ting. I found him in the fallen temple of Chu-Bu with his hands and toes sticking up out of the rubbish, lying upon his back, and in that attitude just as I found him I keep him to this day on my mantelpiece, as he is less liable to be upset that way. Sheemish was broken, so I left him where he was.

And there is something so helpless about Chu-Bu with his fat hands stuck up in the air that sometimes I am moved out of compassion to bow down to him and pray, saying, "O Chu-Bu, thou that made everything, help thy servant."

Chu-Bu cannot do much, though once I am sure that at a game of bridge he sent me the ace of trumps after I had not held a card worth having for the whole of the evening. And chance could have done as much as that for me, but I do not tell this to Chu-Bu.

R. H. MOTTRAM

(1883–)

RALPH HALE MOTTRAM was born at Norwich. After an education in his own city and at Lausanne, he entered Barclay's Bank. At the age of thirty-one he proceeded to France to the first year of the War, in which he fought until the Armistice. His experiences have been crystallized in the immortal *Spanish Farm* trilogy, perhaps the greatest war book this country has produced, the epitome of all the "temporary" soldier thought and felt.

"The Old Man's Chair," from *Ten Years Ago*, is reprinted by kind permission of the author, Messrs. Chatto and Windus, and The Dial Press.

THE OLD MAN'S CHAIR

WHY on earth he had come back there, Skene could not for the life of him make out. He was not enjoying it, had not expected to enjoy it. But surely enough, all those years since the day when, with an air of tragic finality, he had put off his khaki, and put on an ill-fitting civilian suit that had been his best in another life, he had known with increasing certainty, that, sooner or later, he would go back there. And here he was, almost against his wish.

He had not regained control over his thoughts and actions until he reached Ypres. In that place, sheer revolt had cleared his brain and braced his will. Nothing during the journey thither had prepared him for what he found there. Boulogne, never damaged, had only the great cranes on the quay to remind him. Calais had shell-holes, but little else. At St. Omer he had picked up the main way to the Front as he remembered marching it or going by train. There were those solid villages amid the rich fields. Then Hazebrouck, looking mended-up, then more villages. Finally Poperinghe, the obscure market town that for so long had been Railhead. Even then he did not grasp what had happened.

When, with a beating heart, and nerves that fluttered at the slightest sound that resembled the awful crashes he associated with that journey, he got out at Ypres, he had to stop a moment to look round. He had never been there by daylight, and might have had some difficulty in recognising the hastily rebuilt and reinhabited town that he had known only as an ever-yawning tomb. But what rendered it totally unrecognisable was the crowd. To him Ypres was a place of hurrying parties and hastily carried stretchers. He now found it filled with a population that seemed to have come from Blackpool and Ostend, a people of cameras and guidebooks, curious souvenir hunters and bored sightseers, herded and jostled in and out of restaurant and exhibition by uniformed couriers shouting of things he had never heard of, describing a state of affairs that had never existed. He had seen many aspects of the War. He knew that it had its commercial side. But that its grisly remains should be sold, in peeps, at a franc a time, like a mixture of Pepper's Ghost and the Morgue, had never occurred to him. He glared at the hucksters, "*mutilés*" and cheapjacks. They regarded him unmoved, and went on selling their faked products of the "Battle of Ypres" to those who knew no better. He longed to seize one of the megaphones he saw so freely used, and shout: "There never was a battle here; this place never was within bullet range of the trenches!"

But he restrained himself. They wouldn't believe him. They didn't know. Those who did know were mostly dead. These people were buying for pleasure, and selling for a living. Incidentally some of the money that was changing hands would go to rebuild the town he had seen so cruelly destroyed. That was right enough. Why shouldn't it be so? He was there for his own private reasons—the chief of which was that he couldn't keep away. And besides, he had no need to buy. He knew where the real thing was. And, shouldering his way through the crush, he made for the Ramparts, beyond which lay the actual trenches of the longest and most intense battle of the war. He knew them better than the streets of Ypres, had held, at one or another time, every yard of them. Where should he go? to some spot that he could identify and have to himself. He soon thought of it, Kruystraat—on the map, Hell-Fire Corner to him and his—the crossroads of the insignificant hamlet that had never figured in any dispatch, through which the reserve line used to run, and from which the ground sloped away rearward as much as it ever sloped in that dank and dangerous corner they called the Salient. He would see the whole sector from there. It would not be of much benefit, but it would be a sort of expiation. After that he would go home.

He was right. Once outside that celebrated gate and on the newly made up road, the crowd dwindled, and soon ceased. After a few hundred yards he had the place to himself, and walked a little uncertainly, looking at the patches of reclaimed land, amid the weed-covered acres of wastage still to be cleared, starting horribly at the explosions of the finds of the Salvage Corps, still at work by the canal, destroying buried duds. With some difficulty he identified the spot, and here he was. Any happier? Not a bit. There was nothing there. The trenches were gone, much of the ground cleared, a signpost erected, and beyond it ran two lines of corrugated roofs, and timber walls of the new village. That was all. What had he expected? Nothing. Well, he had found—Nothing. He could go home now.

But before he did so, he must stroll and think for a moment. He lit his pipe, and passed slowly down the reconstructed street. Mostly unrecognisable, yet it enabled him, by the gaps left, and by the lie of the land, to call up some vision of what the place had been like, during the various stages at which he remembered it. At the end was the crossroads that gave the place its name. Here had been the front line. He need go no further. A wooden paling of the sort that surrounded plots that were claimed, but not occupied, as yet, by the former owners, suited him to sit on, and there he ruminated on the little known corner where he had so nearly left his bones, as many a better man had done—witness the cemetery, a hundred yards further on. Years ago, studying architecture, he had had a nightmare of town-planning, a site which kept on changing as fast as he laid it out. Well, Kruystraat was the nightmare come true. When first he had come to France, he had met men who had billeted in the village, who remembered civilians being there. Then the line had been pushed back. Even so, he himself remembered the skeletons of houses lining the streets, when he first came up, new to the trenches. Here, where he sat, there had been a bigger house, and the remains of a board with some name on it—Dekonynck, Brasseur, he thought—but it had soon been broken up. He would have forgotten it, had he not remembered that young Mansfield made some sort of silly joke about the name, so that, from his vague knowledge of Flemish, he had explained that it was the equivalent of Fitzroy in English, and that the fellow was a brewer.

He smiled, and then jumped as he had never jumped in the trench that used to run a few feet from him. His eyes had been wandering over the half-reclaimed plot on the rails of which he was seated. At the back was a hut—ex-military stores—the kind of thing that people put up, and put up with, until they could rebuild their houses Just in front of it stood an iron garden chair, the sort that goes with "rustic" work, small greenhouses, middle-class leisure. That was what made Skene jump. That, undoubtedly, was what he had come all this way to see. He knew that chair. It was the only thing he could recognise. Twisted, flaked, dented, chipped, scored with thousands of bullet and shrapnel marks, bleached livid with gas, it was the chair he remembered. Its seat was half gone, one leg was short, but there could be no doubt about it. It was the same chair. At last he had found something remaining over from those days. And, twisting round upon the fence, he sat and surveyed that surviving article of furniture.

He had first seen it on that autumn evening of 'fifteen, when his battalion had taken over that sector. Having seen rations distributed, he had gone out to meet young Forrest, the Divisional R.E. who was to superintend the fatigues—digging of drains for the waterlogged gullies of trenches—for that night. He knew Forrest slightly, and they had gone together, just where he now sat, into the garden next the brewery, where such brickwork as remained screened them partially from sight by day, and from machine gun fire by night. Forrest had just been saying:

"Well, make your chaps work. Because, although I have to look after these ruddy trenches, I don't have to live in 'em, you know!"

Skene had replied something, but Forrest exclaimed:

"Dammit, that was a near one!"

"What's up?"

"Sniper, cut through the band of my puttee!"

It was then that they had stumbled across the chair.

"Very convenient!" remarked Forrest, and sat down, to readjust his leg-wrappings.

Skene had wanted to say: "Don't sit there!" He had a curious aversion to using absent civilians' furniture, hated to see dugouts full of borrowed bedsteads, with looted pictures and mirrors and stoves all about. It had been silly; these things were bound to have been smashed up, or taken by someone. But the fact was, he had been, he now supposed, a thorough civilian, hating the War and all its ways.

However, he did not argue with Forrest. Nor had Forrest argued with him. After a moment or two, getting no reply to the next question, he had groped, by the flickering star-shells, across the tossed and broken space, and found Forrest lying beside the chair, shot through the spine.

It had been unpleasant, but too usual to make much impression until his battalion was relieved, at the end of their turn, plus a day or two, by a Midland unit. The officer commanding the platoon that had taken over from his own, was a keen, pushing youngster from a Black Country town, who referred to the enemy as "those customers," but was capable enough. As they finished going over the flimsy and dilapidated defences, and checked the ever depleted and renewed list of trench stores, the boy noticed the old iron chair, and before it was possible to prevent him, had walked across to it, asking:

"D'you include this—chair, iron-bottomed, officer's, for the use of . . . ?"

"I shouldn't stand there," Skene had called to him, "I believe they've got it taped. . . ."

But the boy was yawning, such a queer, high-pitched yawn, his arms drawn convulsively above his head, then collapsing, with three holes, clean through heart and lungs, and much blood. Skene had hastily called for a stretcher, cautioned the sergeant, and hurried after his own platoon.

It had been weeks before, in the dreary infinitesimal shiftings of that part of the War, Skene had come back precisely to that sector. The old chair was very much where he had left it, and in taking over from the company he was relieving, he had nodded towards it.

"The Boche can draw a bead on that?"

"Can they no'?" had been the Scots answer. "The major fancied it for his dugout, but he'd no sooner got it there than a six-inch lifted it out. Two killed. I'd not go near it, if I were you!" And so, through weeks and months, in and out of the same or neighbouring trenches, he found that the chair had attained a sort of malevolent notoriety, could himself hardly refrain sometimes, when foodless, sleepless, or more than usually bombarded, from a feeling as though the empty seat were occupied by a sinister presence. Then, the Allies taking the initiative, he had moved away, far into other battlefields, other jobs. But he had never quite forgotten that piece of furniture, would inquire from those who had been in front of Ypres, and more than once had been assured that it was still to be seen. The War was changing, the Army also. Those who, like sailors, live in continual danger, become—superstitious? Well, say fanciful. The great Volunteer Army of Britain became like that! The chair at Hell-Fire Corner acquired a name like the stables at Hooge, or the mill at Laffaux, a grim association with innumerable deaths, and years of hopeless efforts. Then, the later and more frantic offensives rolled further afield, and he had forgotten it, and now here it was!

Nonsense! He had let his pipe out, standing there wool-gathering. The explanation was clear enough. The chair was just exactly too small for a direct hit by big shells, too big to be destroyed by small ones, too heavy to be carted away by infantry. Naturally, it had remained where it was, and now the owners would get it back. Who had a better right? They must have suffered enough, poor devils! having their homes destroyed. That would take a lot of "reparations." Yet, having reached this conclusion, he lingered on and on, with a feeling that he had something yet to know before he left Hell-Fire Corner.

And sure enough, he heard behind him the sound of wheels, and at the very palings where he stood, there drew up a little old—"shay" he would have called it—drawn by a white pony. From this descended a round, clean-shaven old man, with that particular certainty of expression only to be found in countries where large sections of the population are peasants and priests. Hitching the reins over the gatepost, this person undid the padlock, entered the enclosure, and moving slowly but confidently across, seated himself in the chair, and proceeded to fill and light a long-stemmed pipe. It was not until he had done so, that he perceived Skene, who had remained rooted to the spot. To him, the presence he had always associated with the chair had materialised. This conversation ensued:

"Good day, sir," from the old man. "It's beautiful weather."

"Yes."

"You are a foreigner?"

"Yes." Skene blushed slightly.

"A *touriste?*"

That he could not stand.

"I came back to see the place," he said lamely.

"How? You have travelled here?"

"I was here in the War."

"Ah, that!" The old man considered a moment some thoughts which seemed very remote, and went on:

"What a misfortune! I had a beautiful brewery here!"

Skene felt compunctious. He had carted away the old man's bricks, burnt his woodwork for kindling, dug up his land for trenches. He could only think of:

"But now this is over, you will be able to start again?"

To his astonishment the old man shook his head.

"I shall not bother (*Pas la peine*)," and at Skene's incredulous look, explained:

"A brewery, it is never a bad job. When the English came, it was even a very fine business. They are great drinkers. I sold all I could brew, and even drew my well dry in making it. But I saw it could not last. The German, you see, is pertinacious. I said to myself, Let them fight, I will leave them to it. I took my money. I went south and set up in munitions. It was even better than brewing. You used plenty of munitions, you others!"

"Yes," Skene was seeing Forrest lying by the iron chair, but it was only the shadow on the ground. The old man grew philosophic.

"It is like that, the human race. I know. I remember 1870. There are two ages of man, the active, and the discreet. I am of the last." He yawned, raising his hands above his head. On the wall of the shed, in shadow, Skene saw the Midland boy raise his hands, heard his gurgling cry. No, it was the old pony, snuffling.

"You think you did something, you others, by fighting. I know better. It will all be put straight and forgotten. You feel satisfied, no doubt?"

"Most of us are dead," Skene answered, and turned away. The words, "It is quite natural" followed him, as he strode towards Ypres.

The little old Flemish town, half rebuilt and ever shapely, glowed in the sinking sun. But to Skene every spot of shadow was a little old man, seated and complacent, in an armchair. They dotted the canal bank, the road, and the railway; with the eye of vision he could see them dotting the continent, the neutral countries, the Americas. They had won. They had come to sit and philosophise. They were right. The active age, the youth of Europe, had gone teeming past them, never so thickly anywhere as in this Salient of Ypres. There, from Roulers, all the youth of Germany, from Poperinghe, all that of Britain and its Allies, had met in a frenzy of heat and endeavour. To allow them to do so, the little old men had shifted their seats, gone off with the money, set up in munitions. The Age of Youth had cancelled itself out. The Age of Discretion had waited, while the flurry echoed away to death, and then came back to claim its reparations, its little bit of land, and to expand its philosophy. Why had he ever pitied them? Now that he reflected, it was they, the little old men, each sitting on his chair, on his bit of money or land, in his chancellerie, his bureau, his office, who made wars. Not Youth. When had he, Skene, quarrelled with a German, a French, or any other youth he had met? Youth was too generous, too busy, had no property to protect, no philosophy to justify.

The War was over, Youth was gone. He had learned his lesson. He would not come there again. He would have no need. He knew now what had haunted that piece of garden furniture during all those nights of feverish energy. An old man sitting in a chair!

F. BRITTEN AUSTEN

(1885–)

FREDERICK BRITTEN AUSTEN was educated at the Grocers' Company School, Hackney Downs. He enlisted in the London Rifle

Brigade in 1914, serving overseas for two and a half years, and receiving his commission on September 8, 1914. Exchanging to the R.A.S.C., he was not demobilised (with the rank of Captain) until January, 1919. His books of war stories are justly acknowledged to be vivid, first-hand pictures of war in all its innumerable facets, while as a playwright the promise of his early work holds out confident expectations for the future.

"A Battlepiece: Old Style," is reprinted from *The War-God Walks Again* (1926), by kind permission of the author.

A BATTLEPIECE: OLD STYLE

(*Dedicated to several million connoisseurs*)

"THAT, gentlemen, will conclude the first phase of the attack. The brigade will then press on, at all costs——"

The officers of four battalions filled the large barn. It was illumed, through the wide-open great doors in its flank, in a cool reflection of the blaze of hot summer sunshine outside. At the further end, on chairs brought from the farmhouse, sat the red-tabbed Brigadier, the red-tabbed Brigade-Major, the four Colonels, and their four Seconds-in-Command. Among them, erect, stood another red-tabbed staff officer, middle-aged, tall, precise-mannered, with an air of authority and the rank of Lieutenant-Colonel. In front of him, a table supported a large relief-model of a section of country scriggled over with red and blue lines. Behind him, on the wall of the barn, was a large map similarly reticulated. As he talked, he emphasised his points with a thrust of his cane to various features of the map and the relief-model "which he hoped all would presently come forward and study with the utmost care."

The infantry officers, in a curious mixture of ages that did not at all tally with their ranks, stood closely grouped or found precarious seats on such agricultural implements as had been left in the barn. There was a curious nervous tension in the silence with which they listened. And not without cause. They were listening to what, for an unknown percentage of them, was a sentence of certain death. No one voiced that aspect of the matter. A psychological X-ray would have revealed each one resolutely suppressing any personal thought, focussing his attention on the technicalities being expounded to them, and attuning himself stoically to the unemotional professionalism of the tall, neatly-uniformed, awkwardly-spoken staff officer. There was going to be another "push." Here, in this peaceful back area of ancient farmhouses embosomed in full-grown summer verdure where the Divisions had, in cynical mess-parlance, been "fattened for the slaughter," the high gods of the "Army" staff, having duly impressed upon the Corps Staffs and the Divisional Staffs what was expected of them, had condescended to explain their requirements, in a series of "Brigade Conferences," to the people who would actually do the work. That humble, lowest-paid arm of the service which throughout the army had succinctly become known as the P.B.I.—translatable for delicate ears as "Poor Blooming Infantry"—should in consequence go forth to battle inspired to Berserk-ecstasy in that matter of close-quarter killing and dying which was its interesting prerogative.

Bitterly although every infantry officer in that barn hated the Staff—with a hatred far transcending any they felt for the enemy—they nevertheless listened with an instinctive awe. It was an awe for which every infantry subaltern in the army kicked himself and yet to which he could not but succumb. That symbol of red-tabs on the lapels and a red band round the cap was so manifestly the symbol of a superior race. On those who wore it the gods had conferred immortality as well as authority. None of them would be killed, except by accident. Few of them had spent a night in the open since the War began. It was rumoured that some of them even dressed for dinner every evening. And on the intermittent occasions when they were seen in the squalor of the trenches, for sojourns of the briefest possible duration, they had—awkward in rarely-worn steel helmets and concerned about the mud on their nicely-polished leggings—irresistibly the air of aristocratic philanthropists visiting the slums. Even hard-faced infantry colonels of long and arduous service became soft-spoken and polite when addressed by some second lieutenant A.D.C. wearing this mystic colour. The prestige of it was irresistible. It betokened membership of the sacred caste to whom war was a matter of poring over maps or signing endless floods of paper—who could, and did, release with a word (written cigarette in mouth in a quiet office), a fury of annihilating forces from whose destructiveness they themselves were happily exempt. They listened therefore to the staff officer at the table—he was G.S.O.2 at Army Headquarters and had a reputation for being uncommonly efficient—almost as pariahs might listen to a Brahmin, with a sense of being in the Presence. He concluded his remarks.

". . . Co-operation with the other arms—tanks, artillery and aircraft—will be as nearly perfect as we can get it. I need not tell you that. But I need not tell you either that it is on the infantry that all finally depends—it must advance with unflinching determination, regardless of its losses——"

"Poor b—— infantry again!" murmured a disillusioned youthful subaltern in the throng. "All the kicks—and no ruddy ha'pence!"

The staff officer picked up his gloves from the table. He would have scorned to be an orator, and winding up a speech was even more difficult to him than commencing one. He coughed and hesitated over his last sentence, forbore to meet the disturbingly experienced eyes concentrated on him, sought refuge in a platitude that camouflaged ugly but distant realities.

". . . And I'm quite sure, gentlemen, we're going to put up a really good show this time."

He sat down.

The Brigade-Major rose to explain the details of the relief-model. The battalion officers crowded up to the table.

The grey dawn had already broken, revealing a landscape beyond imagining in its utter desolation. Its few trees had been splintered to short jagged points and the whole of it might have been stamped on by brutal giants. From unseen origins, a violence of rolling, throbbing thunder, of ear-splitting crashes, of rending disruptions repeated in savage little groups, interwove itself with the whining, wailing, cascade-like rush of projectiles in the air, ceaselessly renewed. Founts of black smoke, of flying mud and debris, leaped by thousands from the tortured earth. From under the low rain-swollen clouds, handfuls of dark smoke-puffs sprang from nothingness with quick sharp cracks and a prolonged menacing drone. On all the battlefield not a human figure was to be seen. It wanted ten minutes of zero-hour. The preliminary bombardment—swelled by partial counter-bombardment—was at its height.

Behind a wrecked trench parapet, an infantry subaltern, faceless and grotesque in a gas-mask, crouched with his eyes upon the dial of his wrist watch. In the semi-fluid mud of the depression between one crumbled traverse and another, crouched some of his platoon, similarly anonymous and grotesque in their masks—weird figures divorced from humanity in a demoniac world divorced from normality. Each had a hand upon the weapon of his job—bayonet-tipped rifle, the divided paraphernalia of Lewis guns, bags of bombs. Among them, rolled on to his face, was the body of a man half covered with a remnant of sack. The mud under him was red, and very fluid. A shell had landed in the trench just before. Two other men had completely vanished in its flash and smoke and stunning detonation. Nevertheless the others crouched patiently in the slush, their only horizon that broken trench parapet beyond which the noise of their own bombardment of the enemy position was one vast paralysing roar—the men they were about to kill, or by whom they would be killed, quite invisible to them.

The subaltern wondered what they were feeling. His own heart was thudding violently. His chest was gripped in a curiously stifling construction; there was an emptiness in his abdomen, an internal sinking of his viscera that seemed to deprive him of physical strength. Their stolidity was odd, fantastic. In half an hour, how many of them would be alive? He himself? He shut off the thought, reverted to remembrance of his objective, repeated it doggedly to himself. "N 25 c," "N 25 c." It was the map reference to an infinitesimal section of the enemy second line. He was to press on to it, hang on, consolidate, wait for the second wave of the attack to pass over him, proceed "mopping-up" behind that second wave. He visualised that objective as he had seen it in miniature on the relief-model, prayed inwardly that he would recognise it. The chances of it not being blasted out of original semblance by that pulverising rain of shells were remote. "N 25 c"—he must get there, hang on. At all costs.

He looked again at his watch. Six minutes. Quite a time yet. Curse these gas-masks! One could not breathe in them. The nose-clip already hurt him. He shivered with a cold that soaked into his bones. That was a nice comfortable billet, that last one. Pretty girl, too. Duck your head!—*down!* CRASH! Fragments all gone over?—Yes. Sickening sound, that hissing rush as it arrives. Brutes! We must be giving 'em hell, though. Wonder how many of their machine guns are escaping? Don't think—no use wondering. Know presently. Five minutes. Still five minutes. He had a sudden vision of that nice clean staff officer at the Brigade Conference in the barn, heard his diffident cultured voice: "You will advance from here to there, and thence to somewhere else." Easy enough for him! He was sitting now, cool and neat in a quiet office somewhere far back, waiting for reports, a cigarette in his mouth. (If only one could smoke in a gas-mask!) He wondered if the War would come to a sudden end if all the staffs who ordered attacks had personally to participate in them. The ironic imagination of it gave him a grim amusement. Four minutes. He willed his heart to beat normally, refused to let himself wonder what death was really like. (By Jove! That was a near one! Anyone hit? No. Good. *Damn* these shells!) Staff officers—yes—supposing they had to attack, too—they wouldn't be so glib then with their "at all costs"—or would they? Good chaps, really, no doubt. Brave as anyone else, probably. Part of a system, that's all. Doing their jobs—ordering other people to wounds and death. Nice job. Wish he hadn't been such an enthusiastic ass. His father could have wangled it—nothing refused to really big contractors. His father—he'd be still in bed now, asleep—snoring—his mother—he saw his mother lying awake in the dawn—stop it, you ruddy fool! Three minutes. How the hand crawled! Was his watch stopping? Couldn't be—wound it when he synchronised last night. He would not think of anything—keep his brain a blank—blank—blank. Politicians at home, sleeping also in nice white beds, getting up to shout: "Win the war at all costs." His uncle. Shut up—*shut—up!* Don't think. An eternity. Could one keep one's mind from thinking? God, this noise! Could understand chaps going mad. Two minutes.

Only two minutes now. What's that? Three fellows blown up—best sergeant, too. Keep down, you idiots! One minute? It couldn't be really only one minute! It was. Less than one minute. He rose automatically, still crouching, eyes on that watch. Half a minute. A fraction—*Now!* He sprang for the parapet, waved his arm to the figures jerking up out of the trench. To right and left of him, hordes of other faceless figures had emerged as by magic, were all going one way.

What followed was a dream—a phantasmagoria that had no reality. Those faceless men who dropped around him were not killed—or were phantoms who had never lived. The little group of tanks that lurched and plunged like ships in a rough sea were prehistoric creatures of a nightmare. The earth leaped up, almost at his feet, in quick red flash, black smoke, and stunning concussion—leaping up all around him, in front, behind, on either side. The enemy counter-barrage. He wasn't killed. A vaguely apprehended miracle. Worst of it was these damned shell-holes—couldn't hurry—up to his waist in water that time—nice job for his servant cleaning off the mud. What was that insistent hissing, like an engine letting off steam, audible through the infernal din? Must get on—at all costs—N 25 c. Look at all those fellows throwing themselves down, taking cover! They weren't going to move. Kick 'em forward? Silly ass! Casualties. Hissing was machine-gun bullets. Marvel he wasn't hit. Charmed life. Thank God, enemy wire blown to bits. Enemy trench just beyond—hell erupting in it—no one visible. Anyone following? Yes. Scattered figures emerging through the smoke. Good chaps. He waved to them.

In their trenches. Ghastly mess. What a lot of blood a man has—never believe it—running down in a stream like that. That faceless snouted figure who had popped up from a hole. His revolver had gone off automatically at it. Figure had dropped. Wonderful how quick it was—fellow was alive then, dead now. What's that coming over? Bombs! Down in the mud—face down—can't help what it is. Damned latrine! Ugh! *Bang-bang-bang!* Close call, that! Bombers! Bombers this way! Here they come—round the traverse—throw—dodge back—*bang-bang-bang-bang!* All quiet behind there? Yes. Only groans. Get on! Come on, all of you—don't matter what regiment you are—*come on!* Damn these gas-masks! Can't shout in 'em! Necessary, though. See that fellow whose mask had been perforated? Pretty ghastly, getting killed like that—just one gasp of air—poison. Place must be saturated with it. Ours or theirs? Ours first: theirs now. Half these shells gas-shells. Muffled bursts. Plenty of H.E., all the same. Shrapnel like rain. Enemy gunners enjoying themselves. My God! Down! Down quick! Damned machine-gun nest! How many hit? The whole bunch? No. Four. Keep down. Into the mud. Tanks!—where in Heaven's name are the tanks? That's what they're for. Here comes one. Wonderful things. It's seen the nest—slewed round—shouldn't like it coming for me. Uncanny great brute. There it goes—clatter of its track like an agricultural machine—letting 'em have it all round with all its guns—what's it like in there—cooped up? There she goes. Over that damned nest like an ant heap. Up we get! Come on, lads! On! They can't hear in this infernal row. Can't shout properly either. *On!* That's right. Along here. Bombers first. Bombers and bayonet-men.

Further on. An aeroplane nose-diving—all but at the earth—in flames. Is this it? Must be second-line. Nothing looks like anything. All right for those fellows sitting behind with their nice neat maps and models. N 25 c—junction of trench with switch. That must be it, over there. Where that dead tank is—looks very dead, head foremost and still, great wound in its back. Smoke issuing from it. What happened to the crew? Not your business. Come on, boys! How many of 'em? Six—eight—nine. Is that all? Yes. No more. Must barricade the junction, quick. Where's the rest of the attack? Can't see anything in this smoke. There's some of 'em. Digging in. Barricade—barricade—anything—yes—dead men—better than nothing—they don't know—shove 'em along—that one, too. Push that arm down out of the way. No. He's dead all right. Thought he wasn't. Not the time to be squeamish. . . .

An eternity. All sorts of things had happened. Things he could not remember. But the shelling had never stopped. The enemy's shelling—and then their own, when the counter-attacks had developed—little groups of snout-faced men emerging suddenly from the mud, machine-gunning, throwing bombs, stabbing with bayonets when they got the chance—there had been incidents like individual murders. It was incredible that he was still alive. He still had men around him—anonymous in their gas-masks—but they were not the same men. These had adhered to him, he could not remember when or how. They crouched now in the mud of the shell-crater along with him. Together they had been driven back—had fought forward again in some sort of new attack that had caught them up and melted away—that was the time those snout-faced fellows had been trapped in a corner of a blocked trench—had been butchered redly, sickeningly—their bare hands trying to push away the bayonets. He remembered he had glanced at his watch. That must have been soon after one-thirty. A long time ago. Eternity. Was it the same day? There had been no victorious second wave behind which to "proceed." Some low-flying aeroplanes had circled over—suddenly appearing through the drenching rain that had lashed them for hours—had dropped boxes of ammunition that fell with a heavy splash in the liquid mud—most of them out of reach.

The shelling was vindictive in its persistence. He could only hang on—hang on.

A counter-attack had sprung up from nowhere, been blotted out—mysteriously, from that apparently untenanted earth. There was a temporary lull. He was desperately hungry—his stomach gnawing at him—fevered with a maddening thirst. There was an "iron-ration" in his haversack; he still had his water-bottle. But he could neither eat nor drink in his gas-mask. It was death to remove it. Two men had died like that before he could stop them. The air was thick with gas, the ground splashed with chemical compound. The leaden sky was still raining in torrents. Little streams of yellow fluid ran down from the mud, mingled with water that was red. Mustard stuff. He was burned with it—it ate into them like corrosive acid—he had been careful, but it had come through his boots. He could not walk—none of those five recently acquired men with him could walk. But they could still work the machine gun whose tripod sank into the mud of the crater, brass-studded belt running through the breech—would use it, if, in the failing light, there were another counter-attack. That was improbable. Enemy would not use mustard stuff if he meant to come back. But their job was to hang on. They were hanging on—hanging on, masked, soaked to the skin, like those other wretched little groups here and there whose presence he could divine rather than see. He had heard them "loosing-off" a few minutes back, through that demoniac persistence of eternally leaping shell bursts whose red cores became ever more lurid in the gathering dusk.

It was black night—would have been black night if the opposing horizons had not flamed and flared incessantly from end to end. The thunder of massed guns, scarcely diminishing all day, had leaped to a new and frantic pitch of vehemence. The mile-wide belt of blinding flashes, of shattering detonations. Both artilleries were "taking it out of little brother"—each viciously destructive on the other's "little brother," the infantry scattered sparsely in a myriad shell holes, denying to them further attack or counter-attack. Presently, the staffs behind would issue a *communiqué*, stating that the new front was "stabilised." He thought this as he lay on his back, head below his boots, in another shell hole. He did not know how he came to be there. He remembered only the vivid red flash of an explosion in among them. There had been, oddly, no sound to it. When he had opened his eyes again the sky over his head had got quite dark, and he was in this position. He had found that he had no strength to alter it. He believed he had slept—once or twice. Thank God, anyway, the cries of that wounded wretch—out of sight somewhere—had ceased. The man had screamed that he was sinking into the mud. Suffocated? Very likely.

He could not bother about it. Wounded himself, of course. Must be—or he would be able to change his position. God! how that mustard stuff burned! When would they pick up the wounded? Not till this shelling died down. Madness to try it now, of course. Sheer madness. . . . It was all madness . . . a riot of madness. . . . Must remember to keep this mask on.

He was in that barn, with the peaceful summer sunshine hot outside. That staff officer was speaking. "We have done our best to make it easy for you—co-operation perfect—push on—at all costs—never mind your losses—attrition—we can afford to lose men—he can't—millions more at home—millions—millions—millions—they'll all go forward into hell and die as we order 'em—we know what we're doing—we run the war, you see—it's *our* war—*our* war—good old war!" He half woke from the delirium. Had the staff officer said that, really? He could not remember. Something like that. Poor b——— infantry! The voice came again, over the heads of the crowd of infantry officers, grains of chaff dancing in the broad band of sunlight from the barn doors, a diffident, gentlemanly voice. "I'm quite sure, gentlemen, we're going to put up a really good show this time." My God, what a burst of shelling! Surely they couldn't be so mad as to attack again? All very well for them—*they* didn't attack—*they* ordered it—and then went to bye-bye in nice clean sheets. For God's sake, stop this infernal shelling! Each crash came inside his head. He would go mad with it. Mad. He was at home, lying in his own bed, his mother bending over him—he was ill, of course—home from school. Dreadful headache. Tortured with thirst—tortured. Why couldn't he drink? There was something over his face—preventing him—was it a cat, a cat lying over his mouth? Something like that had happened—once—beyond remembrance—a baby horror that revived in him in an automatic swift paroxysm. He wrenched at it—wrenched off his gas-mask—had a last stare at lightning-lit sky as he choked. . . .

Back at Divisional Headquarters that day—in one of a neat row of semi-circular corrugated-iron Nissen huts, with gravel paths and flower-beds picked out with whitewashed stones in front of them—the Divisional Commander stood frowning by a staff officer who sat with a telephone to his ear.

The staff officer answered into the instrument. His tone was aggrieved.

"My dear fellow, it's no use cursing us. We're doing our best. Better get on to the Heavy Group. They brought their barrage right back on to our men—spoiled the show. What? Well, that's the reports I get——" He changed his tone suddenly to one of profound respect.

"Yes, sir. Speaking, sir. Very good, sir. Yes, sir—we'll order it at once, sir. What time, sir? Half an hour, sir? You're arranging with the gunners? Very good. Good-bye, sir." He put back the receiver, looked up to his superior. "That Corps 'strafing,' sir—General himself—very angry we haven't gone further ahead—says we've left the flank of the 101st in the air. Wants another attack immediately—in half an hour."

The Divisional General tugged at his ragged white moustache.

"All very well for them!" he growled, in exasperation. "These fellows behind never seem to realise what we're up against. What's the latest?"

The staff officer rose from his chair, went towards the wall where a large map, stuck with coloured pins, was hanging. The Divisional General followed him with a heavy tread, beat his cane irritably against his brilliantly polished brown leggings.

"We've got some odd men hanging out here and here, sir," he indicated the spots on the map—"in the enemy second line—about all that's left of that brigade—the brigade on their right seems to have got completely smashed up by the enemy barrage and their confounded machine guns—what's left of 'em are with what's left of the third brigade. We can send 'em forward again, sir, of course," he concluded hopefully, with a glance at the Divisional Commander.

The Divisional Commander grunted. He listened for a moment to the unceasing thunder of the guns. The hut vibrated with their concussions.

"We must. Tell the brigades. They've got to get on at all costs." He glanced at his subordinate. "We're going to get unstuck for this, you and I, my friend—if they don't." He sighed, staring at the map. A terrible number of Generals had "come unstuck" lately. He pulled himself together, grinned sardonically at his subordinate. "That'll mean the P.B.I. again for *you*, my lad—and some damned training depot for me. But not yet! Not without a fight for it. Is Corps warning the Heavies?"

"Yes, sir."

"Right. Get on to 'em yourself. And get on to the brigades. And for God's sake, see they co-ordinate this time." He looked at his watch. "Half an hour. One-thirty. Objectives as before.—And they've got to reach and hold the third line. *Got to*—mind! No excuses."

The staff officer sat down, picked up the telephone again. It wasn't their fault if the Division hadn't got on. They had done all they could. He almost began to hate this war. He rattled viciously at the instrument. Weren't they ever going to put him through? Lunch-time, too. The General was watching him. Should he "straf"—or be encouraging? "Hallo—brigade!——"

"Corps" lived in a château—a long pretentious building, with box-of-bricks pinnacle towers on each wing in the gimcrack manner of the Second Empire. Save for the numerous telephone wires, supported on the thin black-and-white posts of Army "Signals," which crossed its small and formal park, its exterior appearance had not appreciably altered from peace time. Even the flower-beds had been kept in something like order by the successive Corps Headquarters which had occupied it, each for months on end. The rooks were undisturbed in the patch of tall elms which formed its background. Swans preened themselves in the rain that lashed its ornamental water. Within, however, evidences of military occupancy at once met the eye. The hall and the broad stairs leading from it were without carpet and muddied with the tread of many boots. The white paint of the tall double-doors was dirtied and defaced. What had been the drawing-room was labelled "Q—Clerk's Office." An overpowering clickety-click of feverishly worked typewriters issued from it whenever the door opened for the ingress or egress of some harassed little man in a private's uniform, glasses on his nose, and a pen behind his ear. On other doors were the labels of a surprising number of other special departments. Behind nearly all of them, typewriters clicked furiously. A great many people were desperately busy at their share of the War.

The Corps Commander saw himself in a mirror at the angle as he went up those broad, echoing, dirty stairs. He was a big, heavy man—ex-cavalry, with pouched heavy-browed eyes and a regulation clipped grey moustache, a stubbornly pugnacious face that was now sullen with bad temper. The sight of himself in his steel helmet kept him in his mood of highly serious happenings. He had just been in his car to "see for himself"—had been to the Divisions—had even been to the various Brigade Headquarters or at least to those he could conveniently reach on the edge of the battlefield—there had been plenty of shelling and much mud—"damned unpleasant"—and things were going badly over there on the ridge spouting from end to end with a double barrage. *Damned* badly, things were going—his Divisions could not seem to get on at all. The next and rival Corps apparently had done much better. He had expressed himself with some vehemence—scared a lot of those fellows stiff. They'd come unstuck if they weren't careful. He reached the upper corridor, opened a door.

Within, seated at his desk, pipe in mouth, tranquil, undisturbed, pince-nez on the nose of a thin, studious face, poring over a batch of message-forms that had just come in, was the G.S.O.1 left in charge during his absence. The staff officer looked up at him, smiled.

"Well, sir, how's the War looking?" he asked, in his quiet pleasant voice. The War had lasted three years now and he had seen too many "pushes" to be ruffled. He had the reputation of being a tower of strength to every staff he had been on—and it was a reputation he cherished.

"Rotten. A rotten bad show," answered the General, gruffly. "That half-past one attack broke down almost as soon as it started."

"I know," concurred the staff officer, equably. "There's been another since then—fizzled out also. And three counter-attacks. Speaking generally, we're hanging on to their second line. Fortieth Corps makes us look a bit poor—they're through to beyond the third—screaming about their flanks."

"H'm!" The General strode across to where the big Operations-map hung on the wall, stared at its heavy reticulations of red and blue lines, its massed groups of coloured flags. There—that ragged bunch beyond the others—was where the Fortieth Corps, comparatively speaking, had done its job. The position of the flags marking his own Corps exasperated him to a dull anger—not unmixed with personal trepidation. He swung round to his staff officer.

"Anything from Army?" he jerked out.

"Yes, sir. They've been ringing up, off and on, all the time. In a distinctly bad temper. We can consider ourselves 'strafed.' The General himself was on just now—wanted to speak to you personally."

"H'm!" The Corps Commander grunted. "You told him I'd gone up to the forward area, I suppose?"

"Yes, sir. Seemed to mollify him a bit. Said he wished every general would see for himself—we might get on better then. Hoped you'd really tackle the situation." This was a highly diplomatic rendering of what the formidable Army Commander had really said.

The Corps Commander glared at his subordinate.

"Doesn't expect me to lead a damned infantry platoon myself, does he?" he snapped.

G.S.O.1 shrugged his shoulders.

"He's feeling a bit chippy, sir," he said, soothingly. "He's been 'strafed' himself by G.H.Q. G.H.Q.'s annoyed about the losses—they've got some politician or other with them—makes 'em a bit sensitive."

"Losses?" snapped the Corps Commander. "What do they expect? This isn't a beanfeast. Of course there are losses. Must be. Can't make omelettes without breaking eggs."

G.S.O.1 smiled.

"The trouble is that this time we haven't made the omelette," he murmured.

"Well, whose fault is it?" The Corps Commander glowered at him. "It isn't ours. We've done our best. Haven't been to bed properly for four nights. It's theirs—all their damned Army interference—they run the transport themselves—can't go over a road without their permission—run the Heavy Artillery themselves—send us contradictory orders every five minutes—and then expect us to fight the battle! Our fault if it goes wrong—their cleverness if it goes right!"

The staff officer relit his pipe, while the Corps Commander made a movement to doff his steel helmet, then, catching sight of himself in one of the mirrors left in the room, decided to leave it on. That damned politician might take a fancy to tour round Corps Headquarters—it would look well to be wearing it. He flung himself heavily into a chair.

"Well, what's the next move?" he asked. "Any orders from Army?"

"Yes, sir—they're pulling out two of our Divisions to-morrow sending us two more from reserve. I don't yet know which."

"Up to strength, I hope?" growled the General. "Not the slightest use if they're not."

"I believe so, sir. Two *good* Divisions, they told me. And they expect us to get forward with them. Giving us a second chance to earn something in the next Honours List, sir." He smiled.

"H'm! That confounded 110th—don't know what they were playing at—they simply didn't go forward at all—scarcely even reached the second line—left the 101st absolutely in the air. Hope these are better than that. We want fighting troops—fellows who'll go through anything."

"So many new drafts lately," murmured the staff officer. "The troops aren't what they were."

"All right if we had enough of 'em. These damned politicians! Ought to put the whole nation into uniform. They don't seem to realise. What we want is a million more men—and we'll have to have 'em, too, before we finish. It's the only way. Keep up this killing game. Man for man, we can afford 'em better than he can. Only way to win." The General absent-mindedly took off his steel helmet. It was uncomfortable, slipped sideways on his head.

The staff officer puffed at his pipe in silence. Privately, he held altogether heretical and revolutionary views on the conduct of warfare—on the absurdity of first churning up vast areas into a quagmire by massed bombardment, for example, and then sending masses of troops to be stuck in the impassable swamp as a target for the enemy—but it was no part of his job as a tactful staff officer to make himself unpopular by expressing them. He'd put in a good word for the General, he thought, with a pal of his on the Army staff. The Corps Commander had the brains of a child, and about as much imagination as a bull, but he had undeniable character and driving power with the troops. Pity if he came unstuck. He'd only be replaced by someone as like him as two peas—more difficult to get on with, perhaps. Yes. He'd drop a word in the right quarter. Over the 'phone, privately, later on, to a man with whom he, the staff officer, had been at school. He glanced at the General sitting gloomily in his chair, the steel helmet on his knees. Yes—decent old chap, really—he'd be sorry to see him go.

He shifted the pipe along his mouth, rose from his seat.

"What about a spot of tea, sir? It's ready in the Mess."

The General rose also, with a sigh.

"I think so. I'm dying for a cup." He sighed again. "This damned War—I'm getting tired of it." But at the back of his mind he knew that without "this damned War" he would still be only a cavalry colonel, about to retire on the age-limit, and felt guilty almost of a disloyalty to this magnificent world event.

The staff officer smiled at him.

"Cheer up, sir. It isn't so bad. And we've got those two new Divisions coming to-morrow. I'll give 'em a good talking-to. Perhaps they'll do better. And we'll soon fatten up again the Divisions that we're pulling out. I've been talking to the A.G. about drafts."

They descended to tea in the Mess, discussing man-power and a knock-out blow to win the War as they went. Both of them, in secret recesses of their minds, simultaneously concealed not-to-be-uttered doubts of what would happen to themselves if this everlasting War should, incredibly, really end. But—and they likewise concealed their relief at the thought—it wasn't practical politics just yet. They ceased their discussion as they entered the room where the neat white tablecloth was laid. Both were old-time regular soldiers—and "shop" in the Mess was taboo.

The windows shook with distant gunfire as they sat down.

G.H.Q.'s "Advanced" or Battle Headquarters were in the eighteenth-century Mairie of a fairly large and pleasant town whose cobbled streets were lined with shops that did a thriving trade and whose inhabitants had come to depend on the War as their principal source of revenue. Somewhere between "Advanced" G.H.Q. and the various Corps Headquarters, the Headquarters of the "Army" holding this particular sector completely filled all the available space in a yet larger and also cheerfully inhabited town. With its innumerable "Directorates" and Departments, the "Army" needed ample accommodation—it conducted a vast business with an army of uniformed clerks, feverishly busy in the matter of arranging for the alteration of railroad supply-trains to adjust with the Divisions constantly coming in and out of the line, ordering up vast quantities of ammunition and stores, superintending an infinite complexity of commissariat and road-transport, checking over colossal quantities of paper "returns," imposing its will on stiff-necked Corps staffs, and waging a fierce and ceaseless paper-warfare with G.H.Q. and the various bases for which the other war—with the enemy—merely provided an abstract justification. "Advanced" G.H.Q. did not concern itself with these routine matters. In a final hierarchical superiority, G.H.Q. proper attended to them—and filled two large towns, fifty miles back, with the uniformed population necessary for correct bureaucratic control of the millions of men of whom—somehow—only one out of every three could be spared for the actual fighting. That one-third renewed itself every day by drafts from home. "Advanced" G.H.Q. was a skeleton-force of picked staff officers which left its comfortable quasi-permanent home for the horrors of temporary billets when a new battle called for "close" supervision. Shortsighted members of it had been known to exclaim "Oh, damn the War!" when they ordered their servants to pack.

One of those staff officers had been detailed as bear-leader to the eminent politician who had chosen to inflict himself on G.H.Q. at its busy time. His task, of course, was to give the eminent gentleman the illusion of seeing everything while at the same time preventing him from really seeing anything that really mattered. In company with his charge (privately and wittily designated as "Cuthbert") he descended from the G.H.Q.-flagged motor-car at the Mairie, and he led the way upstairs to the room which was his office. He was tired and out of temper. The politician had insisted on "seeing something of the War," and he had taken him into the forward area, among the heavy artillery positions, to a hill from which he could see the smoke erupting all along the contested ridge. Coming back, they had been held up exasperatingly by endless columns of foot-slogging infantrymen marching through the rain—new Divisions coming up for next day's fight. He had with difficulty prevented the politician from making a speech to one battalion, halted in a village square for an intersecting stream of motor lorries. The politician had thought he might "cheer the lads up a bit." The staff officer had managed to conceal his horror, be duly tactful. Thank God, the trip was now over, the politician satisfactorily brimful of all the wonders he had seen. He invited him to a chair, filled a pipe for himself. In that confounded open car (he hadn't been able to get a limousine) he hadn't had a decent smoke all day. Ruddy War!

The politician produced a cigar.

"It's been marvellous!" he said fervently. "I had no idea of the vast scale of everything. And you really think we're getting the upper hand now?"

The staff officer just stopped himself from shrugging his shoulders.

"Looks like it," he said, diplomatically. "Of course, the army's got to be kept up to strength—the people at home must realise that. We're not at the end of it yet."

The politician puffed at his cigar. He was an amiable man, genuinely patriotic.

"How much longer do you think the War will last?"

The staff officer stared at his interlocutor. Not a question to be answered rashly! He took his pipe out of his mouth, looked at it, put it back again.

"Impossible to say, of course. It's one big machine up against another. Two or three years yet, perhaps, before we're through."

"Two or three—*years!*" The politician stared at him aghast. "You can't mean it. It's not possible." He was almost angry. "Think of the lives—at this rate, hundreds of thousands of lives—two or three years more will cost!"

The staff officer contemplated that toll of lives, unemotionally. These people seemed to think that war was a football match! Of course it would cost lives—but the country was still stiff with men not yet in the army. He must sustain the standpoint of G.H.Q.—good opportunity, in fact.

"Bound to have casualties in war, I'm afraid. We do our best to minimise them, of course. The fact is, it all depends on what the country gives us. We can't make bricks without straw. A really big effort, now, might bring the War to an end. We're planning it, in fact, for next year. But the country must give us men—and munitions—we shall need munitions on a bigger scale than ever next year."

The politician turned his mental gaze to that future. Munitions. His brother was a munitions-manufacturer on an immense scale—was making an immense fortune. More than ever, next year. H'm! That boy of his brother's—in the infantry—he ought to have tried to see him—he wondered if the lad was in the battle whose dull persistent thudding rattled the windowpanes. Two or three years! He'd try and get him out of the infantry—wangle him into a staff job. Would it be worth while speaking about him to this staff officer? No. Unsympathetic type. Better work it from the War Office end.

The weather outside seemed to be clearing a little. An evening light brightened the windows. From somewhere overhead came the loud drone of an aeroplane. It gave the politician an inward jerk of alarm—he had been in quite an unpleasant air raid as he came out of the theatre recently. He cocked an ear up to the sound.

"That's not an enemy, I suppose?" he asked. "Do they ever bomb you here? I take it you Headquarters are always after one another?"

The staff officer shrugged his shoulders.

"They have just tickled us up once or twice," he said, with a tolerant smile. "But, naturally, nothing very serious. It isn't done, you know."

The politician stared at him.

"Not done?"

The staff officer smiled again.

"My dear sir—how d'you imagine we could carry on the War if we started knocking each other's Headquarters to bits? It's altogether too easy. They biff us—we biff them. Nothing to it. Better to fight like gentlemen—leave each other's Headquarters alone. Sort of unwritten law, you know—always has been. There'd be chaos, otherwise."

The politician tried a mental grapple with that problem. "Yes. Yes. I suppose so," he said, but his voice had a note of uncertainty to it.

They sat for a minute or two in silence, smoking. It was very quiet in this room. Only that rattle of the windowpanes reminded the politician that a great battle was raging. He was, fantastically, sitting at the very heart of it, in the ultimate central ganglion of control. It gave him a feeling of awe. It was almost uncannily peaceful in this remoteness from the actual strife. He had suddenly a vision of that smoke-spouting ridge—of the monster guns pumping shells on to it. In that inferno men were dying—killing each other. It was difficult to realise it here. He wondered suddenly if this cool-mannered staff officer *did* realise it—wondered suddenly if *any* of the staffs pitting their brains against each other realised the translation into mud-and-blood horror of their intellectual syllogisms. Probably not. Natural protective screen of the human mind. They could only do their job by reducing it to abstract formulæ. Pleasant sense of power they must have—these millions of men moving at their will, killing one another. They didn't see anything of that. Agreeable life—theirs—ironically agreeable. Suppose the opposing Headquarters *did* bomb each other out of existence—so that they *couldn't* "carry on the War" . . . ? What then? Absurd thoughts . . . !

The staff officer rose.

"Well, what about cleaning up a bit before dinner? I suggest a hot bath, personally. Want one after sitting in that damned chilly car all day. And——" he glanced at his desk, piled with documents awaiting his signature, "I've a devil of a lot of work to-night. Shan't get to bed till the small hours. If anyone ever tells you that we staff officers enjoy the War, you can tell them, sir—it's a first-class lie. There's not one of us wouldn't rather be with the troops."

A day or two later the politician was addressing a packed mass meeting in a munitions district. His audience was composed of working men and women who were earning more money than, in all their lives, they had ever dreamed possible. They were just then seriously considering the expediency of the politician. His visit to the "front" had given him an additional importance. He spoke as a man who had been there and "knew"—the fact gave him, secretly, a very pleasurable feeling.

A successful campaign now for the intensification of munition-output, the stalling-off of this threatened strike, would mean a place for him in the Cabinet at the next shuffling in the cards. He exerted all his eloquence, finished with a soul-stirring peroration: "On you—men and women—depends the destiny of nations. I ask you, the country asks of you, magnificent though your patriotism has been, for yet more effort—for one immense selfless effort worthy of the fathers and sisters and brothers of the lads who are fighting—one great final effort that shall finish the War!"

The grimy audience poured out into the street. One of those workmen summed up the general reaction to the orator's remarks. "Finish the War? 'E don't know what 'e's talkin' abaht!—This ruddy War can go on for ever for all that *I* care—or 'e cares either!—We shan't never 'ave such a time again—any of us. Come on, Emma—let's go to the movies."

Far away, in black night, on a ridge that was a morass underfoot, through an atmosphere that was poisoned, under vindictive murderous outbursts of shell fire, soaked and weary infantrymen stumbled their difficult and dangerous ways to the line of water-filled shell holes whence they would attack at the morrow's dawn. In a staff officer's room, twenty miles in rear of them, half a dozen uniformed press correspondents were writing dispatches to a model thoughtfully supplied by higher authority. They were happy men, busy in a cloud of tobacco smoke. One of them had just had a "brain-wave," copied by the rest with artistic variations: "The troops go forward with the joyous zest of men engaged in a great game—some units went into the last action dribbling a football. . . . It is only the skill and devotion of the Staff that makes scientific modern warfare possible on this vast scale. Even now, perhaps, the great public at home does not fully realise what war means. It has not come home to them as it does to us here——"

D. H. LAWRENCE

(1885–1930)

DAVID HERBERT LAWRENCE came into the limelight as a novelist while he was still in the twenties. Among his works of fiction are *Sons and Lovers* (1913), *Kangaroo* (1923), and *St. Mawr* (1925). He has also written short stories, poems, plays, essays, and *Psycho-analysis of the Unconscious* (1921).

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THE PRUSSIAN OFFICER

I

THEY had marched more than thirty kilometres since dawn, along the white, hot road where occasional thickets of trees threw a moment of shade, then out into the glare again. On either hand, the valley, wide and shallow, glittered with heat; dark green patches of rye, pale young corn, fallow and meadow and black pine woods spread in a dull, hot diagram under a glistening sky. But right in front the mountains ranged across, pale blue and very still, snow gleaming gently out of the deep atmosphere. And towards the mountains, on and on, the regiment marched between the rye-fields and the meadows, between the scraggy fruit trees set regularly on either side the highroad. The burnished, dark green rye threw off a suffocating heat, the mountains drew gradually nearer and more distinct. While the feet of the soldiers grew hotter, sweat ran through their hair under their helmets, and their knapsacks could burn no more in contact with their shoulders, but seemed instead to give off a cold, prickly sensation.

He walked on and on in silence, staring at the mountains ahead, that rose sheer out of the land, and stood fold behind fold, half earth, half heaven, the heaven, the barrier with slits of soft snow, in the pale, bluish peaks.

He could now walk almost without pain. At the start, he had determined not to limp. It had made him sick to take the first steps, and during the first mile or so, he had compressed his breath, and the cold drops of sweat had stood on his forehead. But he had walked it off. What were they after all but bruises! He had looked at them, as he was getting up: deep bruises on the backs of his thighs. And since he had made his first step in the morning, he had been conscious of them, till now he had a tight, hot place in his chest, with suppressing the pain, and holding himself in. There seemed no air when he breathed. But he walked almost lightly.

The Captain's hand had trembled at taking his coffee at dawn: his orderly saw it again. And he saw the fine figure of the Captain wheeling on horseback at the farmhouse ahead, a handsome figure in pale blue uniform with facings of scarlet, and the metal gleaming on the black helmet and the sword-scabbard, and dark streaks of sweat coming on the silky bay horse. The orderly felt he was connected with that figure moving so suddenly on horseback: he followed it like a shadow, mute and inevitable and damned by it. And the officer was always aware of the tramp of the company behind, the march of his orderly among the men.

The Captain was a tall man of about forty, grey at the temples. He had a handsome, finely knit figure, and was one of the best horsemen in the West. His orderly, having to rub him down, admired the amazing riding-muscles of his loins.

For the rest, the orderly scarcely noticed the officer any more than he noticed himself. It was rarely he saw his master's face: he did not look at it. The Captain had reddish-brown, stiff hair, that he wore short upon his skull. His moustache was also cut short and bristly over a full, brutal mouth. His face was rather rugged, the cheeks thin. Perhaps the man was the more handsome for the deep lines in his face, the irritable tension of his brow, which gave him the look of a man who fights with life. His fair eyebrows stood bushy over light-blue eyes that were always flashing with cold fire.

He was a Prussian aristocrat, haughty and overbearing. But his mother had been a Polish Countess. Having made too many gambling debts when he was young, he had ruined his prospects in the Army, and remained an infantry captain. He had never married: his position did not allow of it, and no woman had ever moved him to it. His time he spent riding—occasionally he rode one of his own horses at the races—and at the officers' club. Now and then he took himself a mistress. But after such an event, he returned to duty with his brow still more tense, his eyes still more hostile and irritable. With the men, however, he was merely impersonal, though a devil when roused; so that, on the whole, they feared him, but had no great aversion from him. They accepted him as the inevitable.

To his orderly he was at first cold and just and indifferent: he did not fuss over trifles. So that his servant knew practically nothing about him, except just what orders he would give, and how he wanted them obeyed. That was quite simple. Then the change gradually came.

The orderly was a youth of about twenty-two, of medium height, and well built. He had strong, heavy limbs, was swarthy, with a soft, black, young moustache. There was something altogether warm and young about him. He had firmly marked eyebrows over dark, expressionless eyes, that seemed never to have thought, only to have received life direct through his senses, and acted straight from instinct.

Gradually the officer had become aware of his servant's young, vigorous, unconscious presence about him. He could not get away from the sense of the youth's person, while he was in attendance. It was like a warm flame upon the older man's tense, rigid body, that had become almost unliving, fixed. There was something so free and self-contained about him, and something in the young fellow's movement, that made the officer aware of him. And this irritated the Prussian. He did not choose to be touched into life by his servant. He might easily have changed his man, but he did not. He now very rarely looked direct at his orderly, but kept his face averted, as if to avoid seeing him.

And yet as the young soldier moved unthinking about the apartment, the elder watched him, and would notice the movement of his strong young shoulders under the blue cloth, the bend of his neck. And it irritated him. To see the soldier's young, brown, shapely peasant's hand grasp the loaf or the wine bottle sent a flash of hate or of anger through the elder man's blood. It was not that the youth was clumsy: it was rather the blind, instinctive sureness of movement of an unhampered young animal that irritated the officer to such a degree.

Once, when a bottle of wine had gone over, and the red gushed out on to the tablecloth, the officer had started up with an oath, and his eyes, bluey like fire, had held those of the confused youth for a moment. It was a shock to the young soldier. He felt something sink deeper, deeper into his soul, where nothing had ever gone before. It left him rather blank and wondering. Some of his natural completeness in himself was gone, a little uneasiness took its place. And from that time an undiscovered feeling had held between the two men.

Henceforward the orderly was afraid of really meeting his master. His subconsciousness remembered those steely blue eyes and the harsh brows, and did not intend to meet them again. So he always stared past his master, and avoided him. Also, in a little anxiety, he waited for the three months to have gone, when his time would be up. He began to feel a constraint in the Captain's presence, and the soldier even more than the officer wanted to be left alone, in his neutrality as servant.

He had served the Captain for more than a year, and knew his duty. This he performed easily, as if it were natural to him. The officer and his commands he took for granted, as he took the sun and the rain, and he served as a matter of course. It did not implicate him personally.

But now if he were going to be forced into a personal interchange with his master he would be like a wild thing caught, he felt he must get away.

But the influence of the young soldier's being had penetrated through the officer's stiffened discipline, and perturbed the man in him. He, however, was a gentleman, with long, fine hands and cultivated movements, and was not going to allow such a thing as the stirring of his innate self. He was a man of passionate temper, who had always kept himself suppressed. Occasionally there had been a duel, an outburst before the soldiers. He knew himself to be always on the point of breaking out. But he kept himself hard to the idea of the Service. Whereas the young soldier seemed to live out his warm, full nature, to give it off in his very movements, which had a certain zest, such as wild animals have in free movement. And this irritated the officer more and more.

In spite of himself, the Captain could not regain his neutrality of feeling towards his orderly. Nor could he leave the man alone. In spite of himself, he watched him, gave him sharp orders, tried to take up as much of his time as possible. Sometimes he flew into a rage with the young soldier, and bullied him. Then the orderly shut himself off, as it were, out of earshot, and waited, with sullen, flushed face, for the end of the noise. The words never pierced to his intelligence, he made himself, protectively, impervious to the feelings of his master.

He had a scar on his left thumb, a deep seam going across the knuckle. The officer had long suffered from it, and wanted to do something to it. Still it was there, ugly and brutal on the young, brown hand. At last the Captain's reserve gave way. One day, as the orderly was smoothing out the tablecloth, the officer pinned down his thumb with a pencil, asking:

"How did you come by that?"

The young man winced and drew back at attention.

"A wood axe, Herr Hauptmann," he answered.

The officer waited for further explanation. None came. The orderly went about his duties. The elder man was sullenly angry. His servant avoided him. And the next day he had to use all his will power to avoid seeing the scarred thumb. He wanted to get hold of it and—a hot flame ran in his blood.

He knew his servant would soon be free, and would be glad. As yet, the soldier had held himself off from the elder man. The Captain grew madly irritable. He could not rest when the soldier was away, and when he was present, he glared at him with tormented eyes. He hated those fine, black brows over the unmeaning, dark eyes, he was infuriated by the free movement of the handsome limbs, which no military discipline could make stiff. And he became harsh and cruelly bullying, using contempt and satire. The young soldier only grew more mute and expressionless.

"What cattle were you bred by, that you can't keep straight eyes? Look me in the eyes when I speak to you."

And the soldier turned his dark eyes to the other's face, but there was no sight in them: he stared with the slightest possible cast, holding back his sight, perceiving the blue of his master's eyes, but receiving no look from them. And the elder man went pale, and his reddish eyebrows twitched. He gave his order, barrenly.

Once he flung a heavy military glove into the young soldier's face. Then he had the satisfaction of seeing the black eyes flare up into his own, like a blaze when straw is thrown on a fire. And he had laughed with a little tremor and a sneer.

But there were only two months more. The youth instinctively tried to keep himself intact: he had tried to serve the officer as if the latter were an abstract authority and not a man. All his instinct was to avoid personal contact, even definite hate. But in spite of himself the hate grew, responsive to the officer's passion. However, he put it in the background. When he had left the Army he could dare acknowledge it. By nature he was active, and had many friends. He thought what amazing good fellows they were. But, without knowing it, he was alone. Now this solitariness was intensified. It would carry him through his term. But the officer seemed to be going irritably insane, and the youth was deeply frightened.

The soldier had a sweetheart, a girl from the mountains, independent and primitive. The two walked together, rather silently. He went with her, not to talk, but to have his arm round her, and for the physical contact. This eased him, made it easier for him to ignore the Captain; for he could rest with her held fast against his chest. And she, in some unspoken fashion, was there for him. They loved each other.

The Captain perceived it, and was mad with irritation. He kept the young man engaged all the evenings long, and took pleasure in the dark look that came on his face. Occasionally, the eyes of the two men met, those of the younger sullen and dark, doggedly unalterable, those of the elder sneering with restless contempt.

The officer tried hard not to admit the passion that had got hold of him. He would not know that his feeling for his orderly was anything but that of a man incensed by his stupid, perverse servant. So, keeping quite justified and conventional in his consciousness, he let the other thing run on. His nerves, however, were suffering. At last he slung the end of a belt in his servant's face. When he saw the youth start back, the pain-tears in his eyes and the blood on his mouth, he had felt at once a thrill of deep pleasure and of shame.

But this, he acknowledged to himself, was a thing he had never done before. The fellow was too exasperating. His own nerves must be going to pieces. He went away for some days with a woman.

It was a mockery of pleasure. He simply did not want the woman. But he stayed on for his time. At the end of it, he came back in an agony of irritation, torment, and misery. He rode all the evening, then came straight in to supper. His orderly was out. The officer sat with his long, fine hands lying on the table, perfectly still, and all his blood seemed to be corroding.

At last his servant entered. He watched the strong, easy young figure, the fine eyebrows, the thick black hair. In a week's time the youth had got back his old well-being. The hands of the officer twitched and seemed to be full of mad flame. The young man stood at attention, unmoving, shut off.

The meal went in silence. But the orderly seemed eager. He made a clatter with the dishes.

"Are you in a hurry?" asked the officer, watching the intent, warm face of his servant. The other did not reply.

"Will you answer my question?" said the Captain.

"Yes, sir," replied the orderly, standing with his pile of deep Army plates. The Captain waited, looked at him, then asked again:

"Are you in a hurry?"

"Yes, sir," came the answer, that sent a flash through the listener.

"For what?"

"I was going out, sir."

"I want you this evening."

There was a moment's hesitation. The officer had a curious stiffness of countenance.

"Yes, sir," replied the servant in his throat.

"I want you to-morrow evening also—in fact, you may consider your evenings occupied, unless I give you leave."

The mouth with the young moustache set close.

"Yes, sir," answered the orderly, loosening his lips for a moment.

He again turned to the door.

"And why have you a piece of pencil in your ear?"

The orderly hesitated, then continued on his way without answering. He set the plates in a pile outside the door, took the stump of pencil from his ear, and put it in his pocket. He had been copying a verse for his sweetheart's birthday card. He returned to finish clearing the table. The officer's eyes were dancing, he had a little, eager smile.

"Why have you a piece of pencil in your ear?" he asked.

The orderly took his hands full of dishes. His master was standing near the great green stove, a little smile on his face, his chin thrust forward. When the young soldier saw him his heart suddenly ran hot. He felt blind. Instead of answering, he turned dazedly to the door. As he was crouching to set down the dishes, he was pitched forward by a kick from behind. The pots went in a stream down the stairs, he clung to the pillar of the banisters. And as he was rising he was kicked heavily again, and again, so that he clung sickly to the post for some moments. His master had gone swiftly into the room and closed the door. The maidservant downstairs looked up the staircase and made a mocking face at the crockery disaster.

The officer's heart was plunging. He poured himself a glass of wine, part of which he spilled on the floor, and gulped the remainder, leaning against the cool, green stove. He heard his man collecting the dishes from the stairs. Pale, as if intoxicated, he waited. The servant entered again. The Captain's heart gave a pang, as of pleasure, seeing the young fellow bewildered and uncertain on his feet, with pain.

"Schöner!" he said.

The soldier was a little slower in coming to attention.

"Yes, sir!"

The youth stood before him, with pathetic young moustache, and fine eyebrows very distinct on his forehead of dark marble.

"I asked you a question."

"Yes, sir."

The officer's tone bit like acid.

"Why had you a pencil in your ear?"

Again the servant's heart ran hot, and he could not breathe. With dark, strained eyes, he looked at the officer, as if fascinated. And he stood there sturdily planted, unconscious. The withered smile came into the Captain's eyes, and he lifted his foot.

"I—I forgot it—sir," panted the soldier, his dark eyes fixed on the other man's dancing blue ones.

"What was it doing there?"

He saw the young man's breast heaving as he made an effort for words.

"I had been writing."

"Writing what?"

Again the soldier looked him up and down. The officer could hear him panting. The smile came into the blue eyes. The soldier worked his dry throat, but could not speak. Suddenly the smile lit like a flame on the officer's face, and a kick came heavily against the orderly's thigh. The youth moved a pace sideways. His face was dead, with two black, staring eyes.

"Well?" said the officer.

The orderly's mouth had gone dry, and his tongue rubbed in it as on dry brown-paper. He worked his throat. The officer raised his foot. The servant went stiff.

"Some poetry, sir," came the crackling, unrecognisable sound of his voice.

"Poetry, what poetry?" asked the Captain, with a sickly smile.

Again there was the working in the throat. The Captain's heart had suddenly gone down heavily, and he stood sick and tired.

"For my girl, sir," he heard the dry, inhuman sound.

"Oh!" he said, turning away. "Clear the table."

"Click!" went the soldier's throat; then again, "click!" and then the half-articulate:

"Yes, sir."

The young soldier was gone, looking old, and walking heavily.

The officer, left alone, held himself rigid, to prevent himself from thinking. His instinct warned him that he must not think. Deep inside him was the intense gratification of his passion, still working powerfully. Then there was a counter-action, a horrible breaking down of something inside him, a whole agony of reaction. He stood there for an hour motionless, a chaos of sensations, but rigid with a will to keep blank his consciousness, to prevent his mind grasping. And he held himself so until the worst of the stress had passed, when he began to drink, drank himself to an intoxication, till he slept obliterated. When he woke in the morning he was shaken to the base of his nature. But he had fought off the realisation of what he had done. He had prevented his mind from taking it in, had suppressed it along with his instincts, and the conscious man had nothing to do with it. He felt only as after a bout of intoxication, weak, but the affair itself all dim and not to be recovered. Of the drunkenness of his passion he successfully refused remembrance. And when his orderly appeared with coffee, the officer assumed the same self he had had the morning before. He refused the event of the past night—denied it had ever been—and was successful in his denial. He had not done any such thing—not he himself. Whatever there might be lay at the door of a stupid, insubordinate servant.

The orderly had gone about in a stupor all the evening. He drank some beer because he was parched, but not much, the alcohol made his feeling come back, and he could not bear it. He was dulled, as if nine-tenths of the ordinary man in him were inert. He crawled about disfigured. Still, when he thought of the kicks, he went sick, and when he thought of the threat of more kicking, in the room afterwards, his heart went hot and faint, and he panted, remembering the one that had come. He had been forced to say, "For my girl." He was much too done even to want to cry. His mouth hung slightly open, like an idiot's. He felt vacant, and wasted. So, he wandered at his work, painfully, and very slowly and clumsily, fumbling blindly with the brushes, and finding it difficult, when he sat down, to summon the energy to move again. His limbs, his jaw, were slack and nerveless. But he was very tired. He got to bed at last, and slept inert, relaxed, in a sleep that was rather stupor than slumber, a dead night of stupefaction shot through with gleams of anguish.

In the morning were the manœuvres. But he woke even before the bugle sounded. The painful ache in his chest, the dryness of his throat, the awful steady feeling of misery made his eyes come awake and dreary at once. He knew, without thinking, what had happened. And he knew that the day had come again, when he must go on with his round. The last bit of darkness was being pushed out of the room. He would have to move his inert body and go on. He was so young, and had known so little trouble, that he was bewildered. He only wished it would stay night, so that he could lie still, covered up with the darkness. And yet nothing would prevent the day from coming, nothing would save him from having to get up and saddle the Captain's horse, and make the Captain's coffee. It was there, inevitable. And then, he thought, it was impossible. Yet they would not leave him free. He must go and take the coffee to the Captain. He was too stunned to understand it. He only knew it was inevitable—inevitable, however long he lay inert.

At last, after heaving at himself, for he seemed to be a mass of inertia, he got up. But he had to force every one of his movements from behind, with his will. He felt lost, and dazed, and helpless. Then he clutched hold of the bed, the pain was so keen. And looking at his thighs, he saw the darker bruises on his swarthy flesh and he knew that, if he pressed one of his fingers on one of the bruises, he should faint. But he did not want to faint—he did not want anybody to know. No one should ever know. It was between him and the Captain. There were only the two people in the world now—himself and the Captain.

Slowly, economically, he got dressed and forced himself to walk. Everything was obscure, except just what he had his hands on. But he managed to get through his work. The very pain revived his dull senses. The worst remained yet. He took the tray and went up to the Captain's room. The officer, pale and heavy, sat at the table. The orderly, as he saluted, felt himself put out of existence. He stood still for a moment submitting to his own nullification—then he gathered himself, seemed to regain himself, and then the Captain began to grow vague, unreal, and the younger soldier's heart beat up. He clung to this situation—that the Captain did not exist—so that he himself might live. But when he saw his officer's hand tremble as he took the coffee, he felt everything falling shattered. And he went away, feeling as if he himself were coming to pieces, disintegrated. And when the Captain was there on horseback, giving orders, while he himself stood, with rifle and knapsack, sick with pain, he felt as if he must shut his eyes—as if he must shut his eyes on everything. It was only the long agony of marching with a parched throat that filled him with one single, sleep-heavy intention: to save himself.

II

He was getting used even to his parched throat. That the snowy peaks were radiant among the sky, that the whity-green glacier-river twisted through its pale shoals, in the valley below, seemed almost supernatural. But he was going mad with fever and thirst. He plodded on uncomplaining. He did not want to speak, not to anybody. There were two gulls, like flakes of water and snow, over the river. The scent of green rye soaked in sunshine came like a sickness. And the march continued, monotonously, almost like a bad sleep.

At the next farmhouse, which stood low and broad near the high road, tubs of water had been put out. The soldiers clustered round to drink. They took off their helmets, and the steam mounted from their wet hair. The Captain sat on horseback, watching. He needed to see his orderly. His helmet threw a dark shadow over his light, fierce eyes, but his moustache and mouth and chin were distinct in the sunshine. The orderly must move under the presence of the figure of the horseman. It was not that he was afraid, or cowed. It was as if he was disembowelled, made empty, like an empty shell. He felt himself a nothing, a shadow creeping under the sunshine. And, thirsty as he was, he could scarcely drink, feeling the Captain near him. He would not take off his helmet to wipe his wet hair. He wanted to stay in shadow, not to be forced into consciousness. Starting, he saw the light heel of the officer prick the belly of the horse; the Captain cantered away, and he himself could relapse into vacancy.

Nothing, however, could give him back his living place in the hot, bright morning. He felt like a gap among it all. Whereas the Captain was prouder, overriding. A hot flash went through the young servant's body. The Captain was firmer and prouder with life, he himself was empty as a shadow. Again the flash went through him, dazing him out. But his heart ran a little firmer.

The company turned up the hill, to make a loop for the return. Below, from among the trees, the farm-bell clanged. He saw the labourers, mowing barefoot at the thick grass, leave off their work and go downhill, their scythes hanging over their shoulders, like long, bright claws curving down behind them. They seemed like dream-people, as if they had no relation to himself. He felt as in a blackish dream: as if all the other things were there and had form, but he himself was only a consciousness, a gap that could think and perceive.

The soldiers were tramping silently up the glaring hillside. Gradually his head began to revolve, slowly, rhythmically. Sometimes it was dark before his eyes, as if he saw this world through a smoked glass, frail shadows and unreal. It gave him a pain in his head to walk.

The air was too scented, it gave no breath. All the lush green-stuff seemed to be issuing its sap, till the air was deathly, sickly with the smell of greenness. There was the perfume of clover, like pure honey and bees. Then there grew a faint acrid tang—they were near the beeches; and then a queer clattering noise, and a suffocating, hideous smell; they were passing a flock of sheep, a shepherd in a black smock, holding his crook. Why should the sheep huddle together under this fierce sun? He felt that the shepherd would not see him, though he could see the shepherd.

At last there was the halt. They stacked rifles in a conical stack, put down their kit in a scattered circle around it, and dispersed a little, sitting on a small knoll high on the hillside. The chatter began. The soldiers were steaming with heat, but were lively. He sat still, seeing the blue mountains rising upon the land, twenty kilometres away. There was a blue fold in the ranges, then out of that, at the foot, the broad, pale bed of the river, stretches of whity-green water between pinkish-grey shoals among the dark pine woods. There it was, spread out a long way off. And it seemed to come downhill, the river. There was a raft being steered, a mile away. It was a strange country. Nearer, a red-roofed, broad farm with white base and square dots of windows crouched beside the wall of beech foliage on the wood's edge. There were long strips of rye and clover and pale green corn. And just at his feet, below the knoll, was a darkish bog, where globe flowers stood breathless still on their slim stalks. And some of the pale gold bubbles were burst, and a broken fragment hung in the air. He thought he was going to sleep.

Suddenly something moved into this coloured mirage before his eyes. The Captain, a small, light-blue and scarlet figure, was trotting evenly between the strips of corn, along the level brow of the hill. And the man making flag-signals was coming on. Proud and sure moved the horseman's figure, the quick, bright thing, in which was concentrated all the light of this morning, which for the rest lay a fragile, shining shadow. Submissive, apathetic, the young soldier sat and stared. But as the horse slowed to a walk, coming up the last steep path, the great flash flared over the body and soul of the orderly. He sat waiting. The back of his head felt as if it were weighted with a heavy piece of fire. He did not want to eat. His hands trembled slightly as he moved them. Meanwhile the officer on horseback was approaching slowly and proudly. The tension grew in the orderly's soul. Then again, seeing the Captain ease himself on the saddle, the flash blazed through him.

The Captain looked at the patch of light blue and scarlet, and dark heads, scattered closely on the hillside. It pleased him. The command pleased him. And he was feeling proud. His orderly was among them in common subjection. The officer rose a little in his stirrups to look. The young soldier sat with averted, dumb face. The Captain relaxed on his seat. His slim-legged, beautiful horse, brown as a beech-nut, walked proudly uphill. The Captain passed into the zone of the company's atmosphere: a hot smell of men, of sweat, of leather. He knew it very well. After a word with the lieutenant, he went a few paces higher, and sat there, a dominant figure, his sweat-marked horse swishing its tail, while he looked down on his men, on his orderly, a nonentity among the crowd.

The young soldier's heart was like fire in his chest, and he breathed with difficulty. The officer, looking downhill, saw three of the young soldiers, two pails of water between them, staggering across a sunny green field. A table had been set up under a tree, and there the slim lieutenant stood, importantly busy. Then the Captain summoned himself to an act of courage. He called his orderly.

The flame leapt into the young soldier's throat as he heard the command, and he rose blindly, stifled. He saluted, standing below the officer. He did not look up. But there was the flicker in the Captain's voice.

"Go to the inn and fetch me . . ." the officer gave his commands. "Quick!" he added.

At the last word, the heart of the servant leapt with a flash, and he felt the strength come over his body. But he turned in mechanical obedience, and set off at a heavy run downhill, looking almost like a bear, his trousers bagging over his military boots. And the officer watched this blind, plunging run all the way.

But it was only the outside of the orderly's body that was obeying so humbly and mechanically. Inside had gradually accumulated a core into which all the energy of that young life was compact and concentrated. He executed his commission, and plodded quickly back uphill. There was a pain in his head, as he walked, that made him twist his features unknowingly. But hard there in the centre of his chest was himself, himself, firm, and not to be plucked to pieces.

The Captain had gone up into the wood. The orderly plodded through the hot, powerfully smelling zone of the company's atmosphere. He had a curious mass of energy inside him now. The Captain was less real than himself. He approached the green entrance to the wood. There, in the half-shade, he saw the horse standing, the sunshine and the flickering shadow of leaves dancing over his brown body. There was a clearing where timber had lately been felled. Here, in the gold-green shade beside the brilliant cup of sunshine, stood two figures, blue and pink, the bits of pink showing out plainly. The Captain was talking to his lieutenant.

The orderly stood on the edge of the bright clearing, where great trunks of trees, stripped and glistening, lay stretched like naked, brown-skinned bodies. Chips of wood littered the trampled floor, like splashed light, and the bases of the felled trees stood here and there, with their raw, level tops. Beyond was the brilliant, sunlit green of a beech.

"Then I will ride forward," the orderly heard his Captain say. The lieutenant saluted and strode away. He himself went forward. A hot flash passed through his belly, as he tramped towards his officer.

The Captain watched the rather heavy figure of the young soldier stumble forward, and his veins, too, ran hot. This was to be man to man between them. He yielded before the solid, stumbling figure with bent head. The orderly stooped and put the food on a level-sawn tree-base. The Captain watched the glistening, sun-inflamed, naked hands. He wanted to speak to the young soldier, but could not. The servant propped a bottle against his thigh, pressed open the cork, and poured out the beer into the mug. He kept his head bent. The Captain accepted the mug.

"Hot!" he said, as if amiably.

The flame sprang out of the orderly's heart, nearly suffocating him. "Yes, sir," he replied, between shut teeth.

And he heard the sound of the Captain's drinking, and he clenched his fists, such a strong torment came into his wrists. Then came the faint clang of the closing of the pot-lid. He looked up. The Captain was watching him. He glanced swiftly away. Then he saw the officer stoop and take a piece of bread from the tree-base. Again the flash of flame went through the young soldier, seeing the stiff body stoop beneath him, and his hands jerked. He looked away. He could feel the officer was nervous. The bread fell as it was being broken. The officer ate the other piece. The two men stood tense and still, the master laboriously chewing his bread, the servant staring with averted face, his fist clenched.

Then the young soldier started. The officer had pressed open the lid of the mug again. The orderly watched the lid of the mug, and the white hand that clenched the handle, as if he were fascinated. It was raised. The youth followed it with his eyes. And then he saw the thin, strong throat of the elder man moving up and down as he drank, the strong jaw working. And the instinct which had been jerking at the young man's wrists suddenly jerked free. He jumped, feeling as if it were rent in two by a strong flame.

The spur of the officer caught in a tree-root, he went down backwards with a crash, the middle of his back thudding sickeningly against a sharp-edged tree-base, the pot flying away. And in a second the orderly, with serious, earnest young face, and underlip between his teeth, had got his knee in the officer's chest and was pressing the chin backward over the farther edge of the tree-stump, pressing, with all his heart behind a passion of relief, the tension of his wrists exquisite with relief. And with the base of his palms he shoved at the chin, with all his might. And it was pleasant, too, to have that chin, that hard jaw already slightly rough with beard, in his hands. He did not relax one hair's breadth, but, all the force of all his blood exulting in his thrust, he shoved back the head of the other man, till there was a little "cluck" and a crunching sensation. Then he felt as if his head went to vapour. Heavy convulsions shook the body of the officer, frightening and horrifying the young soldier. Yet it pleased him, too, to repress them. It pleased him to keep his hands pressing back the chin, to feel the chest of the other man yield in expiration to the weight of his strong, young knees, to feel the hard twitchings of the prostrate body jerking his own whole frame, which was pressed down on it.

But it went still. He could look into the nostrils of the other man, the eyes he could scarcely see. How curiously the mouth was pushed out, exaggerating the full lips, and the moustache bristling up from them. Then, with a start, he noticed the nostrils gradually filled with blood. The red brimmed, hesitated, ran over, and went in thin trickle down the face to the eyes.

It shocked and distressed him. Slowly, he got up. The body twitched and sprawled there, inert. He stood and looked at it in silence. It was a pity *it* was broken. It represented more than the thing which had kicked and bullied him. He was afraid to look at the eyes. They were hideous now, only the whites showing, and the blood running to them. The face of the orderly was drawn with horror at the sight. Well, it was so. In his heart he was satisfied. He had hated the face of the Captain. It was extinguished now. There was a heavy relief in the orderly's soul. That was as it should be. But he could not bear to see the long, military body lying broken over the tree-base, the fine fingers crisped. He wanted to hide it away.

Quickly, busily, he gathered it up and pushed it under the felled tree-trunks, which rested their beautiful, smooth length either end on logs. The face was horrible with blood. He covered it with the helmet. Then he pushed the limbs straight and decent, and brushed the dead leaves off the fine cloth of the uniform. So, it lay quite still in the shadow under there. A little strip of sunshine ran along the breast, from a chink between the logs. The orderly sat by it for a few moments. Here his own life also ended.

Then, through his daze, he heard the lieutenant, in a loud voice, explaining to the men outside the wood, that they were to suppose the bridge on the river below was held by the enemy. Now they were to march to the attack in such and such a manner. The lieutenant had no gift of expression. The orderly, listening from habit, got muddled. And when the lieutenant began it all again he ceased to hear.

He knew he must go. He stood up. It surprised him that the leaves were glittering in the sun, and the chips of wood reflecting white from the ground. For him a change had come over the world. But for the rest it had not—all seemed the same. Only he had left it. And he could not go back. It was his duty to return with the beer-pot and the bottle. He could not. He had left all that. The lieutenant was still hoarsely explaining. He must go, or they would overtake him. And he could not bear contact with anyone now.

He drew his fingers over his eyes, trying to find out where he was. Then he turned away. He saw the horse standing in the path. He went up to it and mounted. It hurt him to sit in the saddle. The pain of keeping his seat occupied him as they cantered through the wood. He would not have minded anything, but he could not get away from the sense of being divided from the others. The path led out of the trees. On the edge of the wood he pulled up and stood watching. There in the spacious sunshine of the valley soldiers were moving in a little swarm. Every now and then, a man harrowing on a strip of fallow shouted to his oxen, at the turn. The village and the white-towered church was small in the sunshine. And he no longer belonged to it—he sat there, beyond, like a man outside in the dark. He had gone out from everyday life into the unknown, and he could not, he even did not want to go back.

Turning from the sun-blazing valley, he rode deep into the wood. Tree-trunks, like people standing grey and still, took no notice as he went. A doe, herself a moving bit of sunshine and shadow, went running through the flecked shade. There were bright green rents in the foliage. Then it was all pine wood, dark and cool. And he was sick with pain, he had an intolerable great pulse in his head, and he was sick. He had never been ill in his life. He felt lost, quite dazed with all this.

Trying to get down from the horse, he fell, astonished at the pain and his lack of balance. The horse shifted uneasily. He jerked its bridle and sent it cantering jerkily away. It was his last connection with the rest of things.

But he only wanted to lie down and not be disturbed. Stumbling through the trees, he came on a quiet place where beeches and pine trees grew on a slope. Immediately he had lain down and closed his eyes, his consciousness went racing on without him. A big pulse of sickness beat in him as if it throbbed through the whole earth. He was burning with dry heat. But he was too busy, too tearingly active in the incoherent race of delirium to observe.

III

He came to with a start. His mouth was dry and hard, his heart beat heavily, but he had not the energy to get up. His heart beat heavily. Where was he?—the barracks—at home? There was something knocking. And, making an effort, he looked round—trees, and litter of greenery, and reddish, bright, still pieces of sunshine on the floor. He did not believe he was himself, he did not believe what he saw. Something was knocking. He made a struggle toward consciousness, but relapsed. Then he struggled again. And gradually his surroundings fell into relationship with himself. He knew, and a great pang of fear went through his heart. Somebody was knocking. He could see the heavy, black rags of a fir tree overhead. Then everything went black.

Yet he did not believe he had closed his eyes. He had not. Out of the blackness sight slowly emerged again. And someone was knocking. Quickly, he saw the blood-disfigured face of his Captain, which he hated. And he held himself still with horror. Yet, deep inside him, he knew that it was so, the Captain should be dead. But the physical delirium got hold of him. Someone was knocking. He lay perfectly still, as if dead, with fear. And he went unconscious.

When he opened his eyes again, he started, seeing something creeping swiftly up a tree-trunk. It was a little bird. And the bird was whistling overhead. Tap-tap-tap—it was the small, quick bird rapping the tree-trunk with its beak, as if its head were a little round hammer. He watched it curiously. It shifted sharply, in its creeping fashion. Then, like a mouse, it slid down the bare trunk. Its swift creeping sent a flash of revulsion through him. He raised his head. It felt a great weight. Then, the little bird ran out of the shadow across a still patch of sunshine, its little head bobbing swiftly, its white legs twinkling brightly for a moment. How neat it was in its build, so compact, with pieces of white on its wings. There were several of them. They were so pretty—but they crept like swift, erratic mice, running here and there among the beech-mast.

He lay down again exhausted, and his consciousness lapsed. He had a horror of the little creeping birds. All his blood seemed to be darting and creeping in his head. And yet he could not move.

He came to with a further ache of exhaustion. There was the pain in his head, and the horrible sickness, and his inability to move. He had never been ill in his life. He did not know where he was or what he was. Probably he had got sunstroke. Or what else?—he had silenced the Captain for ever—some time ago—oh, a long time ago. There had been blood on his face, and his eyes had turned upwards. It was all right, somehow. It was peace. But now he had got beyond himself. He had never been here before. Was it life, or not life? He was by himself. They were in a big, bright place, those others, and he was outside. The town, all the country, a big, bright place of light: and he was outside, here, in the darkened open beyond, where each thing existed alone. But they would all have to come out there sometime, those others. Little, and left behind him, they all were. There had been father and mother and sweetheart. What did they all matter? This was the open land.

He sat up. Something scuffled. It was a little, brown squirrel running in lovely, undulating bounds over the floor, its red tail completing the undulation of its body—and then, as it sat up, furling and unfurling. He watched it, pleased. It ran on again, friskily, enjoying itself. It flew wildly at another squirrel, and they were chasing each other, and making little scolding, chattering noises. The soldier wanted to speak to them. But only a hoarse sound came out of his throat. The squirrels burst away—they flew up the trees. And then he saw the one peeping round at him, half-way up a tree-trunk. A start of fear went through him, though, in so far as he was conscious, he was amused. It still stayed, its little, keen face staring at him half-way up the tree-trunk, its little ears pricked up, its clawy little hands clinging to the bark, its white breast reared. He started from it in panic.

Struggling to his feet, he lurched away. He went on walking, walking, looking for something—for a drink. His brain felt hot and inflamed for want of water. He stumbled on. Then he did not know anything. He went unconscious as he walked. Yet he stumbled on, his mouth open.

When, to his dumb wonder, he opened his eyes on the world again, he no longer tried to remember what it was. There was thick, golden light behind golden-green glitterings, and tall, grey-purple shafts, and darknesses further off, surrounding him, growing deeper. He was conscious of a sense of arrival. He was amid the reality, on the real, dark bottom. But there was the thirst burning in his brain. He felt lighter, not so heavy. He supposed it was newness. The air was muttering with thunder. He thought he was walking wonderfully swiftly and was coming straight to relief—or was it to water?

Suddenly he stood still with fear. There was a tremendous flare of gold, immense—just a few dark trunks like bars between him and it. All the young level wheat was burnished gold glaring on its silky green. A woman, full-skirted, a black cloth on her head for head-dress, was passing like a block of shadow through the glistening, green corn, into the full glare. There was a farm, too, pale blue in shadow, and the timber black. And there was a church spire, nearly fused away in the gold. The woman moved on, away from him. He had no language with which to speak to her. She was the bright, solid unreality. She would make a noise of words that would confuse him, and her eyes would look at him without seeing him. She was crossing there to the other side. He stood against a tree.

When at last he turned, looking down the long, bare grove whose flat bed was already filling dark, he saw the mountains in a wonder-light, not far away, and radiant. Behind the soft, grey ridge of the nearest range the further mountains stood golden and pale grey, the snow all radiant like pure, soft gold. So still, gleaming in the sky, fashioned pure out of the ore of the sky, they shone in their silence. He stood and looked at them, his face illuminated. And like the golden, lustrous gleaming of the snow, he felt his own thirst bright in him. He stood and gazed, leaning against a tree. And then everything slid away into space.

During the night the lightning fluttered perpetually, making the whole sky white. He must have walked again. The world hung livid round him for moments, fields a level sheen of grey-green light, trees in dark bulk, and the range of clouds black across the white sky. Then the darkness fell like a shutter, and the night was whole. A faint flutter of a half-revealed world, that could not quite leap out of the darkness!—Then there again stood a sweep of pallor for the land, dark shapes looming, a range of clouds hanging overhead. The world was a ghostly shadow, thrown for a moment upon the pure darkness, which returned ever whole and complete.

And the mere delirium of sickness and fever went on inside him—his brain opening and shutting like the night—then sometimes convulsions of terror from something with great eyes that stared round a tree—then the long agony of the march, and the sun decomposing his blood—then the pang of hate for the Captain, followed by a pang of tenderness and ease. But everything was distorted, born of an ache and resolving into an ache.

In the morning he came definitely awake. Then his brain flamed with the sole horror of thirstiness! The sun was on his face, the dew was steaming from his wet clothes. Like one possessed, he got up. There, straight in front of him, blue and cool and tender, the mountains ranged across the pale edge of the morning sky. He wanted them—he wanted them alone—he wanted to leave himself and be identified with them. They did not move, they were still and soft, with white, gentle markings of snow. He stood still, mad with suffering, his hands crisping and clutching. Then he was twisting in a paroxysm on the grass.

He lay still, in a kind of dream of anguish. His thirst seemed to have separated itself from him, and to stand apart, a single demand. Then the pain he felt was another single self. Then there was the clog of his body, another separate thing. He was divided among all kinds of separate beings. There was some strange, agonised connection between them, but they were drawing further apart. Then they would all split. The sun, drilling down on him, was drilling through the bond. Then they would all fall, fall through the everlasting lapse of space. Then again, his consciousness reasserted itself. He roused on to his elbow and stared at the gleaming mountains. There they ranked, all still and wonderful between earth and heaven. He stared till his eyes went black, and the mountains, as they stood in their beauty, so clean and cool, seemed to have it, that which was lost in him.

IV

WHEN the soldiers found him, three hours later, he was lying with his face over his arm, his black hair giving off heat under the sun. But he was still alive. Seeing the open, black mouth the young soldiers dropped him in horror.

He died in the hospital at night, without having seen again.

The doctors saw the bruises on his legs, behind, and were silent.

The bodies of the two men lay together, side by side, in the mortuary, the one white and slender, but laid rigidly at rest, the other looking as if every moment it must rouse into life again, so young and unused, from a slumber.

THOMAS BURKE

(1887–)

THOMAS BURKE was born in London and has remained faithful to the city of his birth, in his literary as well as his personal career. Burke has limited his writings, very largely, to the life of the East End of London. *Limehouse Nights* (1916) first brought him general recognition, and he has followed this book with a series of work that has illumined the life of that queer world of nondescripts that inhabit "Dockland" as it has seldom been projected before.

"Old Joe," from *Limehouse Nights* (1916), is reprinted by kind permission of the author, and Messrs. Cassell and Co., Ltd.

OLD JOE

MR. PETER PUNDITT nipped out of his little newsagent's and tobacconist's shop in West India Dock Road, carrying in his hand a large, damp sheet, smelling strongly of the press. This he carefully pasted over a demurely complacent contents bill of *The Telegraph*, and then stepped back to look at it in the grey incertitude of the Limehouse twilight. It read:

PUNDITT'S ONE-HORSE SNIP
One Penny Daily
Is Away from Everything
Who Gave
PAINTED LADY
GOLD CUP?

It was to be noted that Mr. Punditt, from motives of modesty or wariness, refrained from throwing any light on his part in this dubious transaction.

With cocked head and silently whistling lips he contemplated his work, recognising, with some satisfaction, how much more arresting was his bill than that of *Gale's Monday Night Special*, by whose side it stood. He was just about to nip in again, when he heard a weak, erratic step behind him, and, turning, beheld a youth of about twenty, with sallow, pimply face, slack-mouthed and furtive. An unlit Woodbine dropped from his lips.

Little Peter Punditt, the smartest bookie in Limehouse, Poplar and Blackwall, turned swiftly about. "Well?"

"Er—look 'ere, Punditt, o' man, I'm—I'm 'fraid I sha'n't be able to manage anything. Y'see——"

"Oh!" Punditt regarded the weed in front of him with an airy tolerance. "Oh! Yeh can't manage anything, can't yeh? Ye're *afraid*, are yeh? . . . Look 'ere, that kind o' talk is twos into one wiv me. See?"

"Twos into——"

"Yerss. It won't go. It's Punditt what's talking to yeh. Yeh know Punditt's way wiv bilkers, doncher? Before I've finished wiv a bilker he's wishing he'd collected stamps instead."

"Yes, but . . . I mean . . . I . . . It was your tips what I followed. You let me down every time. Every time. You said this last was a cert., and I put me shirt on it, and——"

"An' if I did? Who th'ell arst yeh to back 'orses at all? Eh? Did I arst yeh to buy Punditt's One-Horse Snip? Eh? Yeh lose yer money, then yeh come whinin' rahnd 'ere wiv a face abaht as cheerful as cold boiled potatoes on a foggy night. Did I arst ye to put yer money on—eh?" His tone changed. "Look 'ere—don't get gay wiv me, me boy. Cos gettin' gay wiv me's about as 'ealthy as monkeying wiv a buzz-saw. See? You just got to settle up. I gave y'an extra fortnight, and it's up to-day. Lessee . . . Monday, ain't it? Tell yeh what I'll do—an' I don't go as far wiv most people—I'll give yeh two days more. If yeh don't brass up by Wednesday night—then I'll see that yeh get it where the bottle got the cork. That plain enough for yeh?"

He wagged a minatory finger wearing a thick band of mourning in the nail. "Y'know what I can do to you, doncher, sonny? A dozen words out of my mouth, and . . . Wow-wow. You be good, and don't make me do it."

The boy spluttered, with vociferant hands. "No, but, Punditt, o' man, how can I? How can I get it? There ain't no way. I mean——"

"Don't matter a shake of a nannygoat's tail to me where yeh git it or 'ow yeh get it. Yeh got to get it by Wednesday—that's all. Else . . ." He threw his arms to the street, lifted both hands, thumbs protruding upwards. With dramatic pantomime he reversed his hands, thumbs pointing fatefully downwards. "Fumbs up, Punditt. Fumbs down, Perce Sleep. Three quid by Wednesday, mind. Get a sudden rush of brains to the 'ead and perduce it; otherwise . . ." he lingered on the word, "otherwise—I shall behave in a very varicose vein, I can tell yeh."

"No, but, Punditt, I——"

"Suffish. Make a noise like a hoop and roll away!"

From his pallid face the boy expressed the bitter essence of contempt which the weak have for all that is pitiless and strong. His mouth made rude noises. His fingers interpreted them. He went away grieved, for he had no possessions. He slouched away, his feet seeming not in complete accord with his knees. A lurid sunset turned a last sickly smile upon him before it died.

It was Peter Punditt who had spoken, and he knew it was the last word. He knew what Peter could do for him. He knew what Peter knew about a certain affair in Amoy Place. His floury face, flecked with pimples, slacked some degrees further, and he went miserably down the road. He hated the look of it. He had quarrels with God and man and all creeping things, and his legs loathed the pavement. He was smitten and afflicted. He thought he would like to creep away and die. He thought comfortably upon death, and was rather sorry he had not told Peter that he would throw himself in the river that night. Yes; he could die and leave a note that would put the fair khybosh on old Peter Punditt. Mentally, he wrote the note, showing up old Punditt.

But three quid. . . . Was there as much money anywhere in the world? If only he'd been in regular work now—when he kept the petty cash at the warehouse. . . .

Oh, blast it. It didn't bear thinking about. Blast everybody. He hated the world. He hated the sky. He hated his home and all that was in it. No good going home. No good mooning about the streets. No good in anything, so far as one could see. He stopped near the bridge of the Isle of Dogs and glowered upon the river and upon smokestack, rigging and sail.

The evening was at once heartsome and subdued. On the deck of a Nippon the dear, drunken devils of yellow seamen were making soft music on Chinese guitars. A steady frost had settled and, with complete darkness, the usually lowering streets of the Asiatic quarter seemed strangely wide and frank. A fat-faced moon was slowly rising. The waters were swift and limpid, sprinkled with timid stars, and seemed to promise a very blessed time to the weary. On the corner by the dock gates the Blue Lantern shone sharp, like a cut gem. He lounged over the side of the bridge, and, so still was the night, he could almost hear a goods train shunt. It was still enough to bring from a narrow street, flanked by two tremendous walls, a curious sound of *sup-sup, sup-sup*.

Perce Sleep heard it. "Bloody Chinks!" he growled. The next moment the *sup-sup* came from behind him, and a hand fell on his shoulder. A yellow face peered at him. It was old, flabby, steamy.

"'Ullo, li'l Perce!" The words came so musically that one would have said they were sung.

"'Ullo, Chopstick. Gointer buy us a beer?"

"Les. Co'long Shaik Yip. Have plelty beer."

"Aw right. Look 'ere, Chinky, I'm in a mess. You're all right for the ready, everyone says. Got a pot o' the dibs, I reckon. Now look 'ere . . . would you . . . I mean . . . will yeh be a sport, and——"

"Ao." Shaik Yip smiled a meaningless Oriental smile. "Perce want money. Ao. Perce and Shaik Yip talk business. Co'long. Co'long."

And they entered the Blue Lantern and ordered two Gipsy's Warnings and some of the Nearer-my-God-to-Thee sandwiches.

The Sleep *ménage* was not such as one would turn to happily, when weary, for repose. Perce lived with his stepfather, a paralytic, and the old man's daughter, a "softie." The old man, a mass of helpless flesh, lived in a chair by the fireside. He had been a stevedore in his time, and his great shaggy head, his rolling shoulders, and the long, thick arms, all now as white and motionless as death, told a tale of superb strength in youth. There he sat now, and there he was fed and tended and washed. The only life that had been left him was his voice, and of this there only remained a thin piping, so that he was known locally as Old Joe, after that Fleet Street notability who, every morning at ten-thirty in the Fourth Edition, gives the world his famous treble.

His daughter, a slip of a girl, was the mother of the house. Her face had that arresting beauty sometimes seen in the faces of the vacant-minded. There was nothing of the idiot about her, save in her talk and her simple character. She managed the house, and she managed Old Joe, and she strove hard to manage the waster, Perce.

"Wis'ful," someone had said. "Wis'ful—that's 'ow she looks. Like as if she was wanting to catch 'old of something that ain't there."

As for Perce, he only ate and drank and slept at the house, and had little to do with Fanny, save to borrow coppers from her.

"A wicked boy," piped Old Joe. "That's what 'e is. Never tries to get work. Got one job, and got sacked from that, and ain't done a stroke since. 'Anging about pubs and mixin' wiv wasters. Grr! 'E'll end in gaol, mark what I say. Blast 'im. Arr. . . . Fanny's the good girl. Where'd we all be if it wasn't for Fanny? Looks after us and keeps us all going. Does anything to keep the 'ome together, doncher, me gel? Goes out charing, or does needlework. Clever wiv 'er needle, she is. But that blasted Perce. Grr! I'd spit on 'im. I'd turn 'im out the 'ouse if I could. But 'e won't go. Cos 'e knows I'm 'elpless and can't do nothink. Not if 'e's struck me I couldn't do nothink. An' 'e's nearly done it, once'r twice. The blasted drunken little waster. Gawd—if I'd a-got my strength back—I'd learn 'im. You dunno—nobody dunno—what I've 'ad to put up wiv from 'im—all cos I can't move—an' 'e knows it. Things 'e's said to me. Things 'e's done. Gawd. Dunno what I've a-done that I should 'ave to put up . . ."

Whereupon he would collapse and weep cold tears down his huge white face, and Fanny would run in from her daily work, or drop her sewing, and paw him and talk baby-talk to him.

He was right about Perce, though. Perce was the boy for fancy waistcoats and the private bar. Perce was the boy for the athletic saloon—as an onlooker. Perce was the boy for hanging on the fringe of those who lead the impetuous life. But Perce was never the boy for a fight or an adventure or a woman, or for any indulgence that called for quality. Perce was the complete rotter.

Perce was the boy to glower upon the helpless giant and tell him off. "Oh, shut up," he'd snarl. "You ought to be in a work'ouse, you did. Or else in a play. Cut yer blasted yap, cancher, yer rotten old nuisance!"

And the old man would return, shrilly and tearfully: "I'm sorry, Perce, me boy. But I'm an old man y'know, and queer. And I sits 'ere all day and all night, and I can't 'elp *feeling* things. I know ye're a good boy, really, though yeh do speak sharp sometimes. . . . Arr . . . if only Gawd'd give me back my strength, I could work for all of us. Me, strongest man in London Docks, and now a-sitting 'ere day and night, day and night, day and night."

On the Monday night he did not come home, and Old Joe was wondering where he might be, and hoping to Christ he'd tumbled in the river; and Fanny, too, on Tuesday night, was wondering and laying the supper, and hoping nothing had happened, and assuring Old Joe that Perce was a nice, good boy.

At eight o'clock a step sounded in the cadaverous darkness of Bluegate Lane, and Perce came in. His key rattled in the door, and words passed between him and another. He was heard to wipe his boots—a thing he had never been known to do. He seemed to be walking uncertainly, with many feet.

Then the kitchen door was snatched open by Fanny, the soft, and Perce was heard by her and Old Joe to murmur: "Tha'll be all right."

But only Perce entered the kitchen.

He sank at once into a chair, as though wearied almost to exhaustion. He stretched his legs so that fatigue might express itself in every line of his figure. He lit a Woodbine. Supper was on the table—some bread and pickles and cheese, knives, and a jug of beer. He grabbed the jug to his mouth and drank noisily from it, and angrily, as though he were at last getting his rights from the world.

"Well, old 'un," he tossed at the old man, perfunctorily, by way of salutation. He strove to put warmth and jocularity in the tone, but his face and lips remained stiff and cold. He smacked his hands together. "Ah, well," he observed to the room generally. He looked critically at his hands. "Finger nails want cutting," he remarked inconsequently. Old Joe took no notice of his greeting; did not look at him; seemed to be intent on something known only to himself.

" 'Ere, Fanny-baby," called Perce, "want you a minute."

"What you want Fanny for, Perce-boy?"

"Go up t'your bedroom, will yeh, and get those scissors."

"Here's pair scissors here."

"Yes, but . . . I want th'other pair. The small ones in your room."

" 'Oo's that in th'ouse?" snapped Old Joe, with pistol-shot explosion. "Someone's in th'ouse. I can feel it!"

"Can't Percy-boy go'mself?" prattled Fanny.

"No—too tired. You go—there's a goo' girl. Then I'll buy you some chocolate biscuits." He looked covertly to right and left.

"Awright. Fanny go. Cho-co-late biscuits!" she sang, to no tune.

"Fanny!" Old Joe bit off the words. "You stop 'ere!"

Perce slewed round. "Whaffor, old 'un? Why can't she go?"

" 'Cos I don't want 'er to. Fanny—stop. Stop 'ere!"

"Whaffor, daddie dear? Why daddie not want Fanny to go?"

"Cos I . . . I . . . want yeh. There's something . . . something going on. I . . . don't understand. I can feel it. All round, like. Perce, me boy, what you looking like that for? Eh? Whassup? You got some game on, Perce. Oo's that in th'ouse?"

Perce affected not to hear. "Go on, Fan, there's goo' girl. Up yeh go. Old man's got the fair fantods to-night."

"*Fanny!*" It was a shrill scream, strained with effort. "Don't you go. It's yer old dad tells yeh. For the love of God Almighty, don't go. There's something . . . I know. I can feel it. I can tell it by that beast's face. What's 'e want cutting 'is nails this time o' night?"

Fanny ran to him, crooning. "Daddie mustn't call Perce a beast. Percy good brother to Fanny. Going to buy Fanny chocolate biscuits."

"Yerss," said Perce, "don't call me names like that else I'll make a rough 'ouse, I tell yeh. If yeh wasn't a blasted cripple I'd clump yeh one fer that. See?"

The great Windsor chair in which the old man was imprisoned shook with his efforts to raise his piping treble. "Fanny—Fanny—stop! I tell yeh, stop! For the love of the Lord Jesus Christ, stay 'ere."

"No. Fanny go get scissors. You not good, daddie. You call brother beast." And, with a beautiful smile through which nothing could be even divined of the empty mind it clothed, she slipped through the door and disappeared up the stairs, laughing and singing, "Cho-co-late biscuits!"

The old man moaned. His head dropped and wagged. His mouth spat toads in the shape of curses at Perce. Perce moved away. His face was slate-grey. He was limp, and looked as self-controlled as a rabbit about to be slaughtered. He peered into the passage, then passed out, and the old man heard his step ascending the stair. He caught the lazy hum of voices busy in talk. He heard two words, in syrupy accents, which he understood: *Pao-pei!* He heard Fanny's baby accents. "Can't find scissors! Someone's taken scissors. Can't find candle, neether. Someone's taken matches, too."

He heard Perce's voice. "Wait half-a-jiff, Fan. Can't yeh find the matches? 'Ere . . . Fan . . . 'ere. Listen. Something nice for yeh, if yeh'll be a good girl. 'Ere . . . lots of choc'late biscuits. Look . . . no; can't 'ave them yet. In a minute or two. 'Ere, don't be silly. . . . No . . . Just . . . Go on. . . . No, it isn't. . . ."

A door clicked, and swiftly Perce descended the stairs, and entered the kitchen. He was breathing rapidly.

"What you go up for?" whined Old Joe. "Eh? Oh, I know there's something . . . something going to 'appen. I can feel it."

Perce swaggered. "You blasted invalids are alwis feeling and seeing things that ain't there. You'll see blue monkeys next."

Old Joe rocked himself. From above there came a second click; moving feet. There was a moment's silence, then, shattering it, a soft cry, a long-drawn whoosh and a muffled scream. The scream was but a single note, and thereafter came only nondescript low noises.

The old man mouthed and gibbered. He heaved himself idiotically in his chair. "Oh, my Gawd. If I'd a-got my strength. Owh. What are they doing to 'er? What you up to, yeh bleeding swine! Owh. If Gawd don't strike you dead for this. Owh . . . hark at 'er . . . my lamb . . . my . . . O Lord Jesus Christ, save 'er!

"Oh, Perce, dear . . . go up and stop 'em. Stop their devils' work. Fanny! Fanny! What they doing to yeh?" The great white cheeks sagged in many creases as he fought for movement. The heavy arms on each side of the chair dangled like puppets. "Oh, Gawd, if I could find out what they was doing. Oh, if I'd a-got my strength!"

"Oh, shut yeh blasted mag, for Christ's sake!" Perce dropped into a chair and sat scared and pensive. Three long gasps came down the stairway—rhythmic, regular, punctuated by a dull noise.

"Perce! Oh, if I'd a-got my strength . . . oh, I'd squeeze yer throat. Owh. I could a-killed you wiv one 'and. Kill 'im, Gawd! Kill 'im! Strike the bleeder dead! Or give me back me arms. O-o-wh!"

And now he blubbered and whined and entreated. Big tears ran down the doughy face. He writhed. "Oh, Perce—be a good boy and stop 'em before it's too late. I can't bear it. It'll drive me mad. I can't listen to it. . . . Oh, stop yer devils' work and bring 'er down. My bonny li'l gel. . . . Owh. I'd learn 'em to put their slimy 'ands on 'er. If I'd a-got my strength, I'd——"

"Well, you 'aven't. So shut yeh silly face." Perce got up and lit another Woodbine. He looked down uneasily at Old Joe, yet confident of security in the utter helplessness of the living corpse. "Yeh wasting yeh breath, that's what yeh doing. There's nothing to make a fuss about. Nothing. She ain't being murdered. And they ain't doing the other thing, what you think. It's on'y a bit o' fun. Yeh needn't worry. I take me oath she ain't being . . . you know, or anything. She'll 'ave forgotten all about it five minutes after. On'y a bit o' sport, that's all. I got *some* principles, though you think I ain't, y'old perisher. All yer swearing don't do no good, and yer fists can't. And yer making a blasted fuss about nothing at all. Nothing at all. So——"

He broke off. For a moment he wondered why. He had stopped instinctively because something else had stopped: the little cries and gasps.

A door clicked. A step sounded. Someone came downstairs. The old man rolled from side to side, slobbering and dribbling. He had the appearance of one very drunk. Round the half-shut door slid a large, stooping Chinky, flashily dressed in East End ready-mades. Under the yellow skin was a slow flush. His eyes sparkled. His thin, black hair was disordered.

He moved towards Perce. Three coins jingled from his hand to the stretched hand of Perce. Old Joe wobbled. He saw them; they were gold. He jerked his head forward and let out—so suddenly that both men jumped—a high-pitched shout, louder and stronger than any he had before been able to produce.

"Yeh damn devils! Wotter yeh done to 'er? Oh, Gawd, if I'd a-got——"

The Chink turned about and shuffled amiably to the door. Over his shoulder he looked at Perce and made a leering remark, accompanied by a licking of the lips. They nodded heads together.

Curious noises came from the chair at the fire; noises like the low sucking of a wolf. The old man's jaw had fallen fully open and disclosed yellow teeth. His head rolled no longer; it moved in jerks, which grew shorter and shorter.

"My—little—gel . . ." snarled the lips. "O Lord Jesus Christ, 'elp a man!"

"Blasted o' fool," said Perce explanatorily. "Alwis 'aving chats wiv Gawd about something." He took another Woodbine, lit it, and strove to appear casual. His lips were white and his grubby hand shook.

A violent tremor spread along the flabby body of Old Joe. His head was motionless and was turned towards the table. Something seemed to be calling him in that direction; and, as they nodded and whispered, suddenly the Chink, looking across Perce's shoulder, gave a sharp cry and his immobile face was lit with horror.

"Dekko!"

Perce obeyed sharply. And he saw the giant corpse standing on its feet, towering above him, one huge arm stretched to his own white gills, the other, in the joy of returned strength, clutching the long, lean knife from the supper-table.

ANTHONY FARLEY

"THE CHOICE OF A PROFESSION," from *Letters to My Nephew*, edited by S. G. Hobson (1917), is reprinted by kind permission of Messrs. George G. Harrap and Co., Ltd.

THE CHOICE OF A PROFESSION

DEAR GEORGE: When you wrote that you wanted to follow some useful occupation and expressly excluded the law and the academy, you inferentially condemned both these professions as useless. You probably meant that they were more ornamental than useful. I, of course, understand that you did not include the general teaching profession in such a sweeping censure. You meant becoming a don. Teaching is almost the oldest and certainly the most noble of all the professions. It is the foundation of law, medicine, and priestcraft. The English attitude toward education puzzles and irritates me. Throughout Europe, the teacher is not only immensely respected but ranks high. In Scotland and Wales, teaching is properly regarded as an honourable and eminently useful profession. In Ireland, too, I have heard old men speak with awe and gratitude of the "hedge teacher," who, braving the law of the Ascendency, taught young Irishmen the rudiments of knowledge, led them on to Latin (the language of their Church), and so opened the doors to a curious medley of classical tradition and superstition. In England, we put our teachers upon the same financial level as our policemen. We segregate them in very inferior colleges, isolated from university life, and generally treat them as a negligible factor in our social economy. The teachers, hampered by an increasing female preponderance, are partly to blame for showing such a shocking lack of backbone; but the true cause lies deeper and will be found in our national conception of education as an instrument of discipline rather than an awakening and emancipating force. I am told that the formation of the Teachers' Register may lead to more unity of purpose among the teachers and an excess of power, both economic and political. For the life of me, I cannot understand why the teaching profession does not constitute itself into a trust or a guild, and run the whole educational machine. Andrew Carnegie could teach them how to do it in ten minutes. He could; but he wouldn't. He knows better. Anyhow, we have put pedagogy to sleep or to death, and, pending its sure and glorious resurrection, we may dismiss teaching as an occupation quite unfitted for a gentleman. I have read somewhere that, legally, a gentleman must belong to one of the liberal professions, or possess £300 a year without working for it. By this token, my boy, your £700 makes you a gentleman.

You could become doubly a gentleman if you went to the Bar. I do not suppose that you would expect me to give you a double tail to your name, Esq., Esq., but, as you decline to be a barrister, my little conceit is superfluous. But don't run away with the idea that the legal profession is useless. Where would your £700 a year be if we had neither law nor lawyers? When Parnell's divorce case stirred the virtuous public, a cynic remarked that now was the time for all adulterers to stand shoulder to shoulder. And if I do not mistake the signs of the times, when the more intelligent labourers are openly adopting the heresy that labour is not a commodity to be bought and sold like pots and potatoes, that it is a human and therefore a sacred thing, it will soon be high time for the possessing classes to stand shoulder to shoulder in defence of their possessions, their hearths, and their homes, not forgetting those unhappy widows and orphans whose little lost legacies will subject them to all the horrors and miseries of Belgian refugees. When that day comes, the lawyers will be the first line of defence. I can tell you the whole rigmarole. First, a series of prosecutions for conspiracy. The first victim ought to be the editor of *The New Age*, the paper which first denounced the commodity theory. But conspiracy prosecutions are necessarily limited in their scope. You can't put away the whole labouring population under the law of conspiracy. The next step will be a carefully conceived and almost universal lockout. If that fails (as it will) then riots will be engineered—in your innocence, do you suppose that our governing classes are incapable of employing *agents-provocateurs?*—and so we will call out the military.

Thus far I have written with glib certainty. First, the lawyers; next, the police; finally, the military. But will the military respond? I wonder! Will they fire on old comrades? Will they not rather fire upon their own officers? They are learning more than we imagine on the plains of Flanders, in the Inferno of Ypres. I saw a private letter the other day. It came from a German trader in Hamburg to his brother, a naturalised British subject. "All our officers have not been shot by the enemy," it said. Perhaps, in this way, the Germans may finally win the War for us.

I come back to the profession of law. Believe me, it is not ignoble. It gets into ruts. Place and power and emoluments often, but not always, blind it to the finer issues. It is not peculiar in this respect. Taking it by and large, its history is greater, more humane, more ennobling than is the history of the Church. In my own experience, I have always found lawyers more susceptible to ideas than clergymen. They are more human. The true confessional to-day is the lawyer's office. No doubt it fishes in dirty waters. A dear friend of mine, on going down from Cambridge, went to the Bar. In all his life, he had been fastidious, fending off all nauseous things. His first brief compelled him to put questions to a miserable girl that would make a priest blush in the confession box. He quickly procured an official berth. It is a truism, but not a platitude, that law is a double-edged weapon. It has been, and may be, the palladium of our liberties; it has been, and may be an instrument of oppression, of despotism, and of torture. Let us see to it that it does not become the monopoly of bullies and mercenaries. The advocate, even to-day, is not permitted to take a "fee"; nor may he sue for his "honorarium." You might do worse, my boy, than go to the Bar.

I do not forget, too, that our Empire, if not founded on law, is maintained by law. As a Colonial, of sorts, I certainly ought to remember it. Wherever our flag flies, we impose our law. In the little track of tropical territory from which I derive my poor sustenance, six thousand miles from your snug study, we insist upon rigid obedience to law. It reminds me of the little epic of Eleuterio Hernandez.

About a mile from my plantation is the little wooden house that is at once our police station, post office, telegraph and telephone station. There, as magistrate, I sometimes dispense justice. If the local prison is full, I am very merciful. If we want prison labour, then, oddly enough, I am impressed with the necessity of vindicating the majesty of the law. There still hangs on the wall a soiled and frayed print, announcing in English and Spanish, and signed by the Chief of the Police, that five hundred dollars will be paid to anybody, not a policeman, for the body, alive or dead, of Eleuterio Hernandez. Then follows a description of the little ruffian. We are told that he is a chiclé contractor; that he is very short, being but five feet four inches; that his sombrero is generally worn well down over his forehead; that he habitually frowns; and so on, over about six inches of printed matter. Much more fascinating is an attached photograph. An amateur affair quite clearly, but deadly for purposes of identification. He stands beside a chair, the back of which is almost up to his elbow. To lend beauty to the scene, an antimacassar is stretched over the chair. Hernandez, in a white duck suit, a heavy watch chain crossing from one breast-pocket to the other, stares gloomily on the ground, as though lost in the immensity of his thoughts. Five hundred dollars, by the gold standard, for him, alive or dead.

You ask what is a chiclé contractor? Chiclé is the basis of American chewing gum. (A rascally chemist has recently discovered a synthetic substitute.) It is obtained by bleeding the sapodilla tree. It oozes out, a thick, sticky, repulsive-looking stuff. The Belize merchants engage men to go into the bush to collect chiclé. They advance money to these men, who are known as "contractors." They, in their turn, engage a gang of assistants on monthly wages and rations. No light task, I assure you. The bush is almost impenetrable. You cut your way, yard by yard, with machetes. Snakes lurk at the roots. Tread on one and say your prayers. "What happens, happens," say these chiqueros; they shrug their shoulders and press forward. Mosquitoes impregnate them with fever. "What happens, happens." The dry season wanes all too quickly; there is yet much to be done. Press on! All too soon come the torrential rains. "What happens, happens." Let us get back to see how much we have earned. There are girls and rum waiting for us.

In this way Hernandez lived. Flour and bacon and beans; beans and bacon and flour. Sometimes they catch a deer or a peccary; sometimes they shoot a pigeon. Thus did he arrive on his last journey, thinking perhaps of that back yard where he was photographed standing beside the chair with the antimacassar. More likely was he thinking of the girl inside, who was waiting for him, pondering subtle questions to probe her fidelity. To-morrow he would interview the merchants. He had reckoned it all up. There was a good fifteen hundred dollars due to him. When he had paid off his crew, he would be at least eight hundred to the good. The races were coming on. He knew every pony in the colony. With luck he would double his earnings.

Next day he interviews the merchants. Curious! They meet him with long faces. Impassive, he waits. He is puzzled. They tell him that he is yet in their debt. He laughs; it is a bad joke. Come, pay up! His men are waiting round the corner, on the pounce. The girls are waiting. At the store near by are bracelets and bangles and hairpins, wonderful hairpins of tortoise-shell bordered with gold filigree and set with stones. They will sparkle in the black hair of the expectant señoritas. Come, pay up! At Antonio's there is a round table where are dominoes and cards and some old rum that rushes through the veins like fire through the pine-ridge. It is no joke. Our worthy merchants produce their ledgers and their journals and their diaries and their stockbooks. Yes; they are all in order, duly checked. Look! Against every item is a little tick. That proves it "for sure." Not a doubt about it. Instead of fifteen hundred dollars due from them to him, the boot is on the other foot. What tricks has he been up to? Sending the stuff across the frontier, they dare swear. He must pay up. No nonsense about that! He is cornered by the books in front of him and by his men, habitually suspicious, behind. Hot rage and resentment burn within him. Revenge beckons. Nothing to be done at the moment. Lucky for somebody that he is unarmed. He walks out, muttering that he has been robbed. I do not know what he says to his men.

In the little frontier town of El Cayo, happy hunting ground for Mexican and Guatemalan ruffians and smugglers, Hernandez has friends. Two days' struggle against an unfriendly current and he is among them. A few days later our worthy merchants hear of his arrival there. By their sacred books, securely locked away each night in strong safes with combination keys, he owes them fifteen hundred dollars, measured by gold bars, in the bank cellars of Washington and London and Paris—civilised gold. They call upon the law to obtain for them their due. A writ, with all appropriate formality, is issued. Finally, a constable at El Cayo, with this very writ in his hand, approaches Hernandez. What can he know of the subtle distinctions between civil and criminal law? To him, a warrant and a writ are identical. It is, to him, the heavy hand of Pax Britannica seeking to get him out of the way, so that those rascally merchants shall not be found out. Doubtless they have already squared the Department of Justice. Anyhow, what has justice to do with poor men, save only to oppress them? He shoots with swift, sure aim. The dead policeman lies on the ground, clutching in his fast-stiffening fingers the fatal writ.

While outraged justice gasps, running hither and thither, shouting through the telephone, frenziedly drafting reports, Hernandez seeks the shelter of the sombre forest. There is a hue and cry. He instinctively senses it. Mercedes, her eyes no longer bright, nostrils tightly drawn, lips curving downward, comes to Cayo. Mysterious parcels of food and cartridges reach the fugitive. The days grow into weeks. Justice, still outraged, now slackens her paces. Time is on her side; Hernandez will not always remain invisible. Mercedes brightens. There is a bridle track over the Guatemalan mountains. It is watched night and day. Policemen are known to sleep on duty. Zigzagging to the northwest is another track into Mexico. *Quien sabe?* But the tired eyes of Hernandez look not west, but east. He longs for the embraces of his Mercedes. And he waits, with revenge's untiring patience, for any one or two, or more, of those Belize thieves to come to Cayo. He hides near the river, so near that he can hear the almost silent swish of the paddles. Along the river is a narrow turf road. He thinks he hears the muffled pad-pad of ponies' hoofs. He looks out. Yes; three ponies and three riders canter toward him. The middleman, *Dios!* what luck! is one of them. His gun rests on a branch. The riders draw level with the rifle's sight. The bullet flies to its billet. Hernandez moves back into the thick bush. He hears a violent galloping and smiles happily.

Mercedes proves a too powerful magnet. On a dimly moonlit night he creeps into Cayo. Mercedes, sleeping under her mosquito net, feels a hand stealing up to her cheek. She seizes it and passionately kisses it. He moves in beside her. The hours seem minutes. Daylight breaks suddenly; there is no twilight. In ten minutes the sun is up. Quick! Hernandez, quick! Too late! He looks down the barrel of a rifle. At the other end is a grinning Negro. He holds up his hands. The policeman approaches him and foolishly lowers his gun to get the handcuffs. Swift as a startled lizard, Hernandez draws his revolver and another officer of the law has paid the price of fumbling a sure capture.

We next hear of Hernandez leading a gang of desperadoes; sometimes on the Guatemalan side, sometimes on the Mexican side, sometimes in British territory. They camp here; they camp there; they move quickly. What's to be done? His Excellency calls out the mounted volunteers. The Major Commanding invites me to go with them. It seems amusing and a little exciting. Armed like the others, I ride with them for a few days. Hernandez hears of our coming, and in an hour or two is over the frontier. We camp for a week in El Cayo, then return, feeling, and doubtless looking, a little ridiculous. On our return, the fugitive is solemnly outlawed with bell, book, and candle. Then the Authorities bethink them of Mercedes. A message comes to her that Hernandez will meet her at any one of three spots. Let her send a message through the usual channel. Poor Mercedes. The bait catches. She slinks away to the appointed place. Hernandez, all aglow, comes out of hiding. Three rifle shots ring out defiant through the glade. Hernandez lies dead. Mercedes shrieks and falls upon him, crying piteously. Three constables seize her roughly and push her aside. They dig a big hole and throw the dead man into it. On the way back, one of the constables tells Mercedes that he would like to have her as his woman. She spits at him.

Heigho! For the last two hours I have lived all this over again. The story arose out of my little dissertation on law. I think, my dear boy, that, had you gone to the Bar, I should have urged the Chancery side. The little history of Eleuterio Hernandez perhaps tells you why.

Your affectionate uncle,
Anthony Farley.

P.S. Of course, if we cannot rely upon the military, we must conciliate and cajole the labourers. A. F.

F. ST. MARS

"WATCHERS OF THE MUD," from *Off the Beaten Track* (1917), is reprinted by kind permission of the author and Messrs. W. and R. Chambers, Ltd.

WATCHERS OF THE MUD

A Smuggling Story

PEOPLE and poets have praised the dawn as if it had no drawbacks. I do not know why. There is no hour of the twenty-four so dismal as that dread, dead, stagnant hour before the sun rises, when the awful wan dawn-haze creeps over things from nowhere special, not dispersing but showing up the darkness, revealing night in a disgraceful manner—stark, pitiless night, stripped of the merciful purple cloak; night unashamed and blatant, cruel, cold, and monstrous.

It was at this time and in such a light that old "Stiletto" Dobson loomed like a blurred smudge out of the surprised and frowning darkness along the top of the sea wall. He was going eel-spearing; at least, he carried a thing like Neptune's trident, which, by those who go down to the mud of the estuary to earn their daily bread, is said to be used for no other purpose.

People do not go eel-spearing for fun, you understand. It is not the kind of thing one would do unless one were forced. Also, it is a lonely business. It consists in plunging about in the mud-slime of the estuary in pursuit of eels. It is essentially a trade of the very poor—of, in fact, the marshmen, who are a race in themselves, and whose fathers and fathers' fathers were the old fowlers that we read about, and smugglers too at times.

"Stiletto" Dobson was, or appeared to be, an exception to the rule. Eel-spearing seemed to do him well, and, to use his own expression, he liked himself nicely on it.

He was a small, lithe, quick, black-and-tan terrier of a man, with smooth, effortless, swift motion, a soft voice, and eyes that shone like gulls' eyes. He appeared to divide his time between eel-spearing, wildfowl shooting, and sleeping. One presumes he ate; but if anyone ever saw him eat, the fact has not been left on record. If one judged by his white hair and quite a thousand wrinkles, he was an old man. On the other hand, if one judged him by his eyes and his manner, he was young. No one had ever seen him engage in anything else than the occupations named; he was known to have inherited nothing, and in his young, or perhaps I should say more youthful, days it is on record that he was as poor as the rest of his race. But his daughters did not "go to service," nor did they work at a laundry. Mrs. Dobson had been seen in a real silk dress; and, greatest proof of all that he was rich, old Dobson paid for his gun and his dog licence every year, and "never asked no one for a fill," which is a pipeful of tobacco.

The nickname of "Stiletto" was a remnant of his wild and youthful days, and of an affray with knives, out of which he had emerged with a scar over his left eye and the present Mrs. Dobson as his reward.

"Stiletto" Dobson made his way along the sea wall with the short, quick strides affected by all his breed. The light brightened at every stride, and redshanks flew up from the marsh on his left, and fled, crying, "Työ! työ!" Stiletto called them "cussed tooks," because they advertised his presence. Anon he came to some deserted oyster beds, to build which some "company" had been floated, gone smash, and fled to America; while the place itself had been pretty well floated out by the tides again. Here the concrete blocks of the wall had been broken and torn asunder and cast all ways by the water, and here, in a cave formed by these blocks, Dobson halted. Presently he began to burrow like a rat among the pebbles and the rubbish, till suddenly he struck tin. In fact, he unearthed cases of tin to the number of five, and all of them packed full of tobacco. That, however, was his cousin's business, the tobacco being smuggled, and destined later to be taken inland. What concerned him now was another matter altogether.

Beside the square cases lay some long, thin ones. They were not big, and looked as if they might hold any little innocent things, such as umbrellas, for instance. Now, if anyone had told old Dobson that each of those cases held two Lee-Enfield military magazine rifles, no one would have looked more shocked and surprised than he. Nevertheless, that was precisely what they did hold. Seeing that two great Powers were at that moment at issue with one another, magazine rifles were fetching their weight in gold at the time. These rifles might, if smuggled out of the country secretly, be of value. At least, that was the hypothesis upon which Mr. Dobson appeared now to be working. One of those Powers, at any rate, was willing to pay almost anything for good rifles and ammunition. Dobson wrapped some old sacking round one case, shouldered it with his trident, so that to the casual eye it might appear to be part of his paraphernalia for the capture of the elusive eel, and, with bare feet and trousers tucked up to his knees, boldly squelched out on to the mud.

Now and then he would stop to probe with his spear at the mud, in the orthodox fashion used by eel-fishers. From the shore the action looked natural enough, and one so familiar to the coast guard half a mile away, watching things in general through his telescope, that he did no more than favour the old man with a passing glance. Had that coastguard known that there were, in point of fact, no eels where Dobson was dibbling, and, further, that Dobson knew there were none, he might have taken more interest in the matter. But he did not know, and that is why old Dobson manœuvred, always spearing zealously, until he reached a small island of gravel and marram grass well out in the middle of the estuary. Here he hid the two rifles, at a spot specially chosen beforehand, and forthwith speared his way back to shore again.

Six times did "Stiletto" Dobson manage, always apparently by chance, to spear his way from shore to that island. He never approached the island from the same point, of course; and once he spent half an hour in spearing eels in real earnest, just to make things look all correct; and each time did he convey to, and hide two rifles on, that island. It was very neatly done indeed.

When it was all over, he turned to his hiding place, half filled his eel-basket with tobacco—it was a singularly capacious eel-basket, by the way—placed the few slimy eels he had caught on top, slung all over his back, and started with his little, quick stride on the home journey. The tobacco, it may be remarked, was to go into England, the rifles to go out, and the handling of both was a dangerous business.

It was some fifteen minutes later, just as he rounded a bend and came in sight of a rotten old wooden quay where all the villagers' boats lay, that "Stiletto" Dobson got his first shock. A group of marshmen were gathered round the head of the quay. Many of them, like Dobson, had evidently come in from eel-spearing, carrying their baskets on their backs. That was nothing, however. It was the smudges of blue—Royal Navy serge—among them that made Dobson catch his breath. There was no less a person than Mr. Fox, Chief Officer of Coast Guards for the station, accompanied by two men. That they were on duty he knew, because he saw their swordsticks. Heaven, the Admiralty, and their quiet, alert selves alone knew what they wanted, though.

Stiletto did not pause, not being a fool. Also, he was already too close to risk turning back. He drew a deep breath, shut his teeth together with an audible snap, and kept straight on. And it seemed as if the basket on his back had got suddenly as heavy as lead. Stiletto was distinctly unhappy, for which reason, perhaps, he assumed a gay smile, and broke forth into song, after the custom of all eel-spearers when at work.

Nicholas Fox, Chief Officer of His Majesty's Coast Guards for the station at the village of Quigley Harbour, had evidently been stirred up considerably by something, and his bearings were heated, as it were. As a matter of fact, he had received an imperative message from the Admiralty, informing him that large quantities of contraband goods were leaking into the country, and, what was worse, that a friendly Power had urgently represented to His Majesty's Government the fact, that still larger quantities of modern arms and ammunition were leaking out of the country into the hands of that friendly Power's enemies. It was not known on what part of the coast the smuggling was taking place, but it would not be well for that chief officer in whose district the leakage was allowed to continue. Apparently the Government had cussed the Admiralty, the Admiralty had cussed the coast guards, and the coast guards, in terror for their billets, were exercising their right to examine everything brought on shore, from a winkle up to a fishing smack. And here was "Stiletto" Dobson, pitchforked by fate into the very centre of the whole stirred-up hornets' nest.

It was a beautiful situation, and it was not made any the more interesting from the villagers' point of view by the sight of Squire Quigley, J.P., in the centre of the crowd, keeping a hard, cold grey eye upon people in general.

"Stiletto" Dobson hurried up to the sullen group as if he was anxious to witness the fun, instead of wishing himself anywhere else in the wide world.

"What's t' matter?" he queried of a Voice that lived inside a pair of huge terra-cotta trousers such as fishermen affect.

"Ye've got t' be searched, I reckons, like t' rest of us. So naw ye knaws, dan't ye?" replied the Voice.

Stiletto smiled, and the Squire, turning that moment, noticed the smile, for it was not quite an ordinary smile. A close observer would have seen that each time he smiled Stiletto solemnly shut his left eye. It was not a wink. If one had not seen him smile often without doing it, one would have said it was a "trick" he had. It might have been a sign or a signal.

"Hullo, Dobson! Earning a honest living for a change, eh? Glad to see you haven't been poaching my duck—what? Give you a week's imprisonment next time you come up before me, my man," shouted Squire Quigley.

Dobson smiled and touched his cap. He and Squire Quigley had been at war for years over the matter of poaching, and the usually good-hearted Squire's bitter enmity against the man was a byword of the district. This was the first time the tall, powerful, blonde-bearded gentleman had spoken to the little man for two years.

The searching of the boats—the little turtle-backed gunning-punts—continued in a sullen silence. The coast guards worked with the slow, ordered haste which is peculiar to our navy and to naval men. They did the thing thoroughly, being fearful for their posts, overlooking nothing, tapping here, poking there, examining and turning out all things under their leader's quick, penetrating, brown eyes.

At last, when there were only Dobson and one more man left to be examined, the Squire deliberately stretched his arms and yawned.

"Well, Fox," he remarked, "don't seem to have made much of a catch—eh? Sort of a mare's nest—what? Think I will get away and dress for dinner."

He turned away, and then, seeming to recollect something, came back.

"Have any of you men some eels to sell?" he asked. "Weakness of mine, you know. Like 'em for breakfast," he went on, turning to the coast guard officer as if in explanation.

Two or three men offered him their catch, but he called to Dobson, who had made no move.

"Here, my man. No one shall say I am not just, or that I boycott any fellow. I'll give the devil his due for once, and buy your eels, just to encourage you in honest paths, though I expect I shall be harbouring the fox that eats my pheasants, or duck rather—eh, what? How many have you there?"

Dobson "'lowed" that there were "'bout six," and the company were properly impressed when the Squire gave him five shillings and took the basket.

"No, I am not a proud man," Squire Quigley muttered, weighing the basket. "One of the old school, Fox. Don't mind dirty hands.—You can call for the basket in the morning, Dobson.—Good night, Fox. Glad you find all my people honest."

And he turned away with that deliberate, heavy stride which is the mark of the wielders of the law in general, and of Englishmen in particular.

"Stiletto" Dobson watched the retreating broad back with a grimace indicative of nothing in particular save blankness. He felt as if someone had poured a bucket of cold water upon his stomach. He was wondering vaguely what sort of a volcano would open up when the Squire found that which was hidden below the eels in that basket.

Mr. Fox was watching the broad back also, but his thoughts were different. He was thinking that he ought to have searched that basket, but—well, the Squire was what is known as a "funny" man, good-natured, but quick-tempered and intolerant of interference. "Anyway," thought Mr. Fox, "he will be as good a searcher as any, perhaps, being a J.P."

"That's done ut," whispered Dobson's cousin in his ear. "I knawed ye'd somethin' on ye when I sees ye smile th' pass smile. Better 'ide, Stiletto, I reckon."

Stiletto said nothing. He waited till the coast guards left, then went openly to his cottage. But he never entered the cottage. He went in at the front gate and out at the back through the garden hedge. He fetched a circle of one mile through lonely fields, and returned to the oyster beds aforementioned. Here, in the centre of the beds, were the old factory and the house of the manager. The place was now tumbling to decay, but was still water-tight. In its way it was a strategic position, for none could approach the place except along one of the narrow walls dividing each oyster bed from others, and in doing so he would be in full view of the house.

"Stiletto" Dobson entered the silent, echoing place, stepping like a cat. He passed to an old fireplace, before which the manager had, no doubt, sat at his ease on winter evenings. He felt at a hole in the wall where once the grate had been bolted in, and, lo! even as he slipped his fingers into the cavity the whole concern revolved on its hinges, revealing two steps downwards, and a little room, a tiny room, quite dry and comfortably furnished, taking its light from an aperture in the chimney farther up!

It was evident that whoever organised this gang of modern smugglers, or, as they preferred to be called, contraband runners, knew what he was about. As a matter of fact, they did not know who was their leader. None of them had ever seen him. His name was represented merely by a mark, a sign. Presumably he lived in London. They did not know. He gave his orders to deputies through a speaking-tube, and they conveyed them verbally to the marshmen who did the work. The dividing of the profits, the planning, the sale of the contraband, all was the work of that mysterious leader whom no one had ever seen, and yet who seemed to know so much, even to the doings of every man employed.

"Stiletto" Dobson had gone into hiding simply because he expected that within a few hours at the least the Squire would discover the smuggled tobacco in his eel-basket, and in consequence the country would be raised against him. His wife gave out that he had gone on a cruise in a fishing smack. She knew what to say, that good woman—had had to say it before, in fact. What, after all, would have been more natural for such a man than to go on a fishing cruise?

Therefore, when his cousin arrived—on his hands and knees mostly—just before dawn, with provisions for the exile, and reported that nothing had transpired, Dobson scratched his lean head and looked worried.

"'Pend upon ut, they're layin' low. I knaws th'm. They think they're goin' t' catch I by keepin' quiet. I sees their little game," he said.

And his cousin—a sour-faced, bullet-headed, clean-shaven man—nodded in wise concord. "Sez I to myself, sez I, yew go careful. Th'm goin' to lie low," he admitted. "So I come four mile roun' in case old Fox's men be followin' of me."

But when a week had gone by and nothing happened, Dobson's perplexity changed to fear. He could not remain in a secret chamber, six feet by eight, all his life, he said. The natural energy of the man began to run to impatience, as a lettuce runs to seed. Every other day his cousin arrived with supplies and no news—that was the terrifying part of it. The Squire went about with his natural face and his customary manners; Mr. Fox and his men did no more; it was inconceivable.

At last Stiletto came out. He could bear the hiding no longer. He kept to his cottage at first, but as weeks wore on and nothing happened, he commenced to steal out and get about his business. For one thing, the barge which stole up the deserted harbour from time to time, ostensibly to load gravel, and, during the dark hours, removed the rifles from Dobson's hiding place on the little island aforementioned out into the Channel, where she transhipped them, ammunition and all, to a big tramp steamer whose business it was to carry them half across the world to the place where they were urgently needed—this barge was beginning to get impatient. She wanted more rifles. She got them at last; for Dobson, emboldened by the inaction of the Squire, fell to work again, and—nothing happened.

II

It cannot be said that Mr. Fox was very pleased. He was a man who loved ease, and he got it not in those autumn days that followed after the events set forth in the last chapter. The Admiralty informed him more urgently than ever that he was neglecting his duty—he and several others, for it was only vaguely guessed that the contraband was being run from the south coast—that the friendly Power had again made urgent representations regarding the gun-running.

"Holy Moses!" exclaimed Mr. Fox, banging the telegraph instrument with his fist. "Do they think I grow 'em in my back garden, then?"

But he flung on his coat and ordered his men—there were twelve on the station—to turn out, swordsticks and all. Six he ordered to patrol the shore of Quigley Harbour southwards to its mouth, and six he took with him northwards towards the oyster beds. Contrary to the usual method, however, he ordered his men to patrol inland on their way out, and along the shore on their return journey. Thus any smugglers flying from the one part might reasonably be expected to run into the arms of the other.

It was a foggy, though moonlight, night, cold and still. Mr. Fox argued that this was a good night for smuggling, and if any were going on in his district—and he was not yet certain even of that—this might be a good time to endeavour to discover it. He had no fixed plan, beyond the steady patrolling of the harbour, and not the slightest suspicion of "Stiletto" Dobson and his relations.

And Stiletto was moving along the shore surreptitiously a mile ahead of them at that very moment.

On his back Stiletto was carrying some three hundred rounds of solid-drawn brass cartridges. They had that evening come down by motor-car from London, two thousand rounds in all, and it was Stiletto's business to convey them from the corn stack with a hollow inside in which they were hidden out to the little island on the mud, where they would be called for by gravel-barge later.

It was not in itself a very difficult task. The wild duck were in, and Stiletto carried his heavy 8-bore gun slung across his back. He was a well-known wild-fowler, and none would challenge his presence here with his gun, provided always that he kept to the foreshore and was not actually seen with the heavy cartridge cases on his back. As to that danger, he trusted to his ears to warn him of anyone approaching along the shingle, and he had several hiding places for the cartridges made along his route in case of a mishap.

One thing only he had not reckoned upon. Mr. Fox had ordered his men, as has been said, contrary to general custom, to start their beat on each side from the extreme end, and to work their way back along the shore, as usual, thus causing the two parties to converge upon each other, and join at a place near the ruined oyster beds.

Thus it happened that "Stiletto" Dobson, hurrying before the sound of approaching footsteps in his rear, suddenly found himself running into the arms of similar sounds in front, and came to a halt with a groan.

Luckily for him, in that great silence which lives on the desolate estuary when there is no wind, sound carries a long way. The two patrols approaching along the shore from opposite directions were yet some distance off. On the other hand, "Stiletto" Dobson happened just to be caught between two of the alternative hiding places he had made for his contraband in case of need. He dared neither to go back to the one nor forward to the other. The position was, therefore, somewhat lugubrious, and did not give Stiletto any pleasure at all. He swore profanely.

There was only one thing for it—he must bolt straight across the oyster beds to the old factory. If he could do that, and hide the cartridges in the secret room, he could face anybody with his antiquated wild-fowl gun on his shoulder and a smile on his face.

For a moment Dobson halted to listen. Then his face hardened, and he started to run. The other people were running now also. They must have heard him.

His course lay at right angles to the sea wall along a path between the oyster beds, which was lower than it. It was no pleasure of Dobson's that the mist should choose that moment to thin slightly, however, and let down a filtering moon-haze. A redshank—that curse of all wild-fowlers—leapt up from somewhere on the shimmering mud, yelling fiendishly "Tyop! tyop!" as it fled. It was enough to give him away and mark his course, even if a curlew had not finished the job, a moment later, by racing into the dark, a vision of great wings, leaving behind a long-drawn, wailing cry of "Cour-lip! cour-lip!"

"Cussed tooks!" muttered "Stiletto" Dobson, and a shout sounded from the sea wall. He had been seen.

But this meant more than the mere fact. It meant also that in all probability he had been seen to be laden with something, not clearly, perhaps, but enough for those who followed to couple with the fact that he was running away, and draw fairly correct conclusions.

The faint blurs of men racing along the sea wall faded out in the mist as he glanced back, for they had to run some way at right angles to his course before hitting the direct path.

The coast guards gained quickly. He could hear the steady thud, thud of that ordered trot which is called a "double," and means discipline all the world over. He turned the corner of the echoing, deserted building, his breath coming in great gasps, his knees bent and almost giving out, his eyes starting.

And a shout, a challenge calling him to halt, sounded not a hundred yards behind.

"Stiletto" Dobson stumbled blindly into the pit-like darkness of the first room he came to. It was not the right room; not the room with the revolving fireplace and the secret room behind it which meant safety. Not the right room at all; but that was round another corner, and he had no time, even if he had had the strength, to get to it—which I doubt.

Here in this room, however, in the earth, below the gaping boards of the floor, was a hole, without a top or any fancy device, which Dobson had now and then used to store odds and ends in. It was a poor enough hiding place for contraband ammunition, and was sure—quite sure—to be discovered by the coast guards when they instituted that terrible, ordered search which he knew would follow upon his capture. But it must serve. At the present it would give him time, say a few minutes, in which to think.

Gropingly in the blackness, he bundled the cases of cartridges into the hole—he could have found it blindfold, I fancy—and scraped some plaster and rubbish over it with his hands.

Then he stopped and "froze," and there followed that silence which comes when one disturbs a rat which is gnawing in a room. Something had moved *inside* the room, something surreptitious and menacing.

Dobson listened between laboured gasps. Outside, only ten yards from the door, the coast guards were running and shouting, and "Stiletto" Dobson half rose. Then he went down again with a thud and a sob of outdriven breath. Something, someone, had sprung upon him from within the room—from behind.

There was a flash of lights, the sound of a frenzied, wordless struggle, the gleam of Mr. Fox's pocket electric lamp, the beating of shod feet on bare boards, and a thousand echoes running allwhither into the heart of the deserted factory—the weird cries of rudely awakened wild fowl in the darkness without, and—silence.

"Stiletto" Dobson, as in a dream, looked up into the keen, grey eyes of Squire Quigley only six inches above his own. The Squire had him on his back, his great weight pressing down the little, squirming smuggler as the weight of a bulldog pins a stoat. The Squire's great hands held Dobson's wrists as in a vice; his flaxen beard brushed the little man's white locks. Dobson saw the ring of blue-clad men around him, saw the bar-like gleam of the drawn sword sticks, heard the sharp order from Mr. Fox to close in. Then the Squire rose.

"Poaching as usual," he said, in his deep, ringing voice.

"Pardon me, Squire," put in Mr. Fox, stepping forward. "I claim the prisoner on a much more serious charge than that."

Squire Quigley raised one finely arched eyebrow in mild surprise; but there was a touch of haughtiness in it that might have stung a quieter man than Fox.

"Indeed, Fox!" he answered. "And may I ask what that is?"

"Smuggling," was the curt reply.

Squire Quigley sat himself down slowly—aye, on the very rubbish which covered Dobson's hastily hidden cartridges sat he. He opened his cigarette case and carefully chose and lit a cigarette. Then, still with one eyebrow haughtily raised, he looked at the six coast guards and their officer and the gleam of steel among them; he looked at the lithe little form of "Stiletto" Dobson covered in dust, sitting forlornly on the rotting floor. Then—and then he burst into a mighty roar of laughter, that ran through the empty rooms and set the web-encumbered rafters rocking to a thousand echoes, and awoke the gulls on the mud banks outside, so that they set up a clamour of answering cries singularly like mocking laughter out in the night there.

"Fox," he cried, "you amuse me infinitely, you and your smuggling bogey-man. I've known this old rascal here"—and he pointed to Dobson with a huge outstretched arm, still shaking with laughter—"some twenty years. Clever poacher I know him to be; a leader of poachers I suspect he is; but a smuggler? Oh, name of twenty fiends! Why, you're going back to the days of our great-great-grandfathers, Fox. I shall fine this man for poaching next week. Smuggling be sugared!" And the Squire slapped his huge thigh, and rocked with the crazy building to the tune of his own laughter.

Mr. Fox bit his lip. "But I have private information leading me to suspect him of gun-running," he snapped, savage that he was being thus laughed at like a child before the men. "We saw him running away laden with heavy packages."

"My poor wild duck, you mean," cut in the Squire.

"No; packages of weight. Cartridges—Lee-Enfield cartridges. They must be hidden here now," fairly shouted Mr. Fox in his anger.

"Cartridges! Oh, dear! oh, dear!" The Squire burst out afresh in another bull-like roar. Then he suddenly sobered down. "But seriously, Fox," he said, "one can hardly credit such things in these days of the twentieth century."

"But I can and will prove it," burst out the commander of the coast guards, now fairly well jumped out of his grooves, as it were.

"Prove it, then!" snapped the Squire suddenly. "I have been Squire of Quigley for twenty-five years, and I ought to know something of my own people. I am, in a way, responsible for them. I defy you, Fox, to prove your charge."

Mr. Fox was by this time white in the face with suppressed rage, all the more venomous because before such a great man as the Squire it had to be suppressed.

"Search!" he commanded, swinging round to his men, and spitting out the single word like a cat that has been unwittingly trodden upon. And they—the six that were with him, and the other six who had just come up—searched with that peculiar, dread, ordered thoroughness which marks our coast guards.

Every board of wall and floor was tapped; every yard of ground the pursuit had covered was gone over at least twice; every foot of mud on either hand was rigidly examined. From head to heel they overhauled Dobson; from sea wall to ruined factory they worked the ground again, and from floor to roof they ferreted the factory. And all the time Squire Quigley sat upon the heap of rubbish that covered those fatal cartridges, and rocked with laughter or snorted with rage, as the fit took him; and "Stiletto" stood between two armed coast guards, and wondered if he was dreaming or drunk, or if this was some insane nightmare, from which he would presently awake to find the dawn streaming in at his window.

At last the men gathered in the room where the Squire was still seated. Mr. Fox stood in the doorway, pulling his beard and gazing at Dobson as one who could save him from a very awkward position if he could only be forced to speak.

"Well?" asked the Squire.

"Nothing," was the curt reply.

And Squire Quigley gave an odd laugh that made Dobson turn and look at him. It would almost have appeared as if the Squire were on his side, had he not known from bitter experience what a hard man, a "stickler for justice," the Squire had always shown himself to be.

When the Squire spoke, however, there could be no doubt as to his attitude in the matter. "Dobson," he said sharply, "this matter of smuggling or no smuggling is no concern of mine. You are released under suspicion. I also release you under suspicion of poaching; but I warn you that the next time you will not be likely to escape so easily. You have been fined for poaching often enough. You go to prison upon the next occasion. You can go so far as I am concerned.—How about you, Fox?"

"Yes," growled Mr. Fox, "we can find nothing. He can go; but I am certain in my own mind, nevertheless. I think we will go also, sir. We are disturbing your flight-shooting."

The Squire turned and took up his favourite hammerless gun. "Well, I must confess I do not care for my preserves to be disturbed too much, but you have your duty, naturally," he remarked. "Call in at the Hall on your way home, and tell them I said you and your men can do with refreshment. Good night."

He rose as he spoke and strode out behind the officers of the Crown. Dobson was already departed, but not far; he was hiding in the tamarisks barely three hundred yards away. He saw the coast guards depart one way, and the Squire another. A double shot some distance off ten minutes later told him where the sportsman was located, and he crept back to the ruined factory and removed those deadly cartridges before dawn. It was too risky to leave them there. Perhaps Mr. Fox might take a fit into his head to return and make a private search on his own.

Indeed, as "Stiletto" Dobson entered his backdoor in the lone, cold grey of dawn some hours later, Mr. Fox, all alone, came to the ruined factory, and began a careful investigation of the place, which lasted him two hours, and told him nothing at all.

III

It was a cold, hard, blustering evening some three weeks after "Stiletto" Dobson had been so nearly caught over that little matter of the cartridges. "Stiletto" was sitting by the fire in his cottage, holding up to the blaze his small feet, clad in those long grey stockings which men wear who go to their work in heavy sea-boots. Evidently he was settling down to an evening of ease and a laborious reading of the paper. "Stiletto" read after a style of his own, a slow process involving much movement of the lips and pondering over long words.

Then the garden gate creaked (it always creaked if anyone entered by it; "Stiletto" had seen to that), and "Stiletto's" cousin, "Alby" Dobson, strode in at the door. He was not alone, however; another and a different breed of man accompanied him—one well-dressed, keen-faced, dark-visaged.

"It is for to-night," remarked the newcomer at once, as one who is accustomed to give orders. "I have brought them in my motor-car. You will get them to the island before morning. There will be four of you—not working together, you understand, for that will increase the risk, but independently. It is the last lot—the completion of the contract. To-morrow you draw your money, enough to keep you, without—er—running contraband, for your life. There." He flung out a lean brown hand as he spoke. "Those are the chief's last orders. I had it in his own voice this afternoon. He thanks you all. You have worked well, and deserve your reward, especially you, Dobson."

"Stiletto" sat bolt upright and reached for his heavy sea-boots, never far from him. He was a man quick of action, as most soft-spoken men are, and economical of speech.

"Ah," he said, "that chief who none of us knaws, and nobody 'ave ever see'd. Just an order through a tube" (but he pronounced it "toob"), "and there ye are. Just a voice, as one might say. 'E ain't no fool, 'ooever 'e m' be. But I wonder 'oo t' gracious he is."

"Ah," laughed the stranger, sitting down, not without grace, and lighting a cigarette, "many have wondered that, my friend, and will. Even I do not know—I who am his chief deputy—and never shall." He turned slowly and gazed out of the tiny window at the threshing trees. "He may be a native of this town, or of Jericho, or New York. We may see him and speak to him daily, for aught we know"; and he made with his finger nail on the cloth the sign thus, ↟ —the treble-barbed arrowhead, by which this chief of smugglers, who preferred to remain nameless, was known to his men.

"Stiletto" Dobson put on his heavy boots thoughtfully.

"It'll be dark in fifteen minutes," he remarked. "And t' wind'll drop with t' tide. Like as not, if fog comes on, as it may, Mr. Fox'll be tryin' on some o' 'is fancy games, but I ain't afraid o' 'e. So naw ye knaws." And he made a gesture with his free hand indicative of the wiping of Mr. Fox off the earth.

The deputy rose with a laugh, and, shaking hands, departed. It would appear that, though a gentleman, he loved the game for itself.

Fifteen minutes later Dobson and his cousin left the cottage and went different ways. Half an hour afterwards Dobson alone arrived at the shore of the estuary, burdened with his first load of cartridges, and pushed off in his shallow, turtle-backed, cigar-shaped, flat-bottomed gunning-punt, ostensibly to go wild-fowling.

The wind, as he prophesied, was falling swiftly with the tide. There was no moon as yet, and the silence was the silence of a desert or the boundless ocean. Save for the occasional, sudden, sword-like whistle of wild ducks' wings overhead, or the passing bugle-like clamour of a "gaggle" of wild geese, there was no sound. It was just the night for smuggling, gun-running, and other questionable and risky occupations that thrive not in the light of day.

"Stiletto" Dobson had made four journeys, carrying the cartridges on his back from the place where they were hidden in the hollow wheat-stack a quarter of a mile or so to the shore, where he placed them in his gunning-punt and rowed them on the falling tide to the little island out in the middle of the estuary. Here, before dawn, a gravel-barge would come, ostensibly to dig gravel—a common enough practice on these harbours—and would take the cartridges out into the English Channel, where they would be transhipped to a steamer whose business it was to run the gauntlet of the friendly Power's cruisers and deliver them where they were most urgently needed, as has already been explained. Dobson saw by the sinking of the piled-up cases within the stack that his companions were working swiftly, as he was himself, each independently from a different point. And now this was the last journey. In his punt he carried the last load.

He noted as he pushed off from the shore, and paddled out craftily on muffled oars, that the wind had dropped, and left a mist fast thickening to a fog. The tide, too, had fallen; there was barely seven inches of turgid water beneath his flat-bottomed punt, though farther out, towards the main channel of the estuary, there would still be water enough. Banks of oozy, glistening mud loomed here and there out of the fog, ghostly and menacing shadows. Far away a single pounding report rang out suddenly, denoting where Dobson's cousin "Alby" was making pretence to shoot wild fowl. And Dobson lifted his gun suddenly and fired at a shadowy flock of widgeon at that moment crossing the moon. A dull splash not far ahead told the smuggler that one, at any rate, of that flock would feed on the still, steely reaches no more. He, too, would tell all whom it might concern that he was plying his legitimate trade.

Then, after picking up the widgeon, he rowed on in silence through the fog. Once or twice he turned his head uneasily. He had a sort of feeling that he was being followed. There were now and then faint splashings in the murk of the fog, but these might have been made by fish—or, again, they might not.

Slowly he made the main channel of the estuary, and turned up it towards the island. In spite of the moon, it was impossible to see anywhere more than a few yards ahead because of the fog.

Suddenly Dobson stopped rowing and "backed water." The birds were coming towards him; flock after flock whistled past quite close, or shied at sight of him and beat upwards overhead. A boat was being rowed down the channel in his direction, frightening up the birds as it came. Nay, more; he felt almost certain now that someone was behind him, too. The sudden cries of the birds a few seconds after they had passed him would suggest that. Perhaps it was his own cousin, however. He knew no coast guard could follow him over the shallow way by which he had come.

They who approached from ahead were different, though. No mere punt this, he knew, by the confusion among the fowl. Moreover, they came quickly—so quickly that in a few seconds he could hear the beat of oars—that short, regular beat which no seaman can mistake; it was the stroke affected by the Royal Navy. They who came were rowing "navy stroke"—were, in fact, coast guards.

Dobson spun his light craft about as a whirligig beetle spins in a puddle, and raced up a narrow side-channel, away towards the land. He fled into the arms of the gathering fog, but as he went he heard a sharp hail, inviting him to heave-to at once, and the strokes of the approaching oars quickened furiously.

He knew that he was being pursued by the coast guard cutter, and he did not accept the invitation to stop. He removed, over a mud bank and up the small channel, towards land. The boat of the law, being larger, had to make a short detour and strike the mouth of the channel where it ran into the main one lower down, but the inspiriting way in which she took the bend and came hissing up into the straight left no doubt as to which was the faster boat. The coast guard cutter, manned by six men, was overhauling the unseen, flying Dobson at every stroke, cutting down his four hundred yards' start at every minute.

He might certainly have thrown the incriminating ammunition overboard, but that would have served him little. There was scarcely two feet of water under his punt now, even in the little channel. Soon there would be less. In an hour it would be almost dry. The abandoned cartridge-boxes would stick up out of the water like milestones out of snow. The approaching coastguards were not blind—they must see them; and even if they did not, they would institute a search, and quickly find them. It must be remembered, indeed, that he had fled, fox-like, on the first alarm. Wild-fowlers with a good conscience do not do that. There would be questions asked which he could not answer. Moreover, he was a suspected man already.

Suddenly "Stiletto" Dobson stuck his oars hard down in the water, and slid across the channel on a wild "cant," "backing water" for dear life. A long, low, shadowy shape—another punt—had shot out from behind a mud bank close ahead. Driven by strokes the power of which would have been a marvel if there had been any time to think about it, the punt fairly hissed towards him. So far as Dobson knew, only one man could row like that, or would dare to do so, on these treacherous waters, and that man was Squire Quigley. It *was* Squire Quigley.

"Stiletto" gave a gasp, and bent hurriedly outboard to fend off the Squire's punt and avert a collision.

"Got your pattens?" muttered Squire Quigley hurriedly.

Dobson nodded. He had still got his hand half raised to strike a blow and avoid a capture.

"Then put them on, man—quick! Winged two geese, and they've flapped across the mud to the big pool close inshore there"; and he pointed with his huge hand to where the sea wall might be. "Not enough water for my punt," he continued, jerking out his words gruffly and in an enormous hurry. "Fetch them for me, Dobson, before they get too far. I will stand by your punt."

"Stiletto" Dobson, taken completely by surprise as he was, was thinking quickly. Here was a chance to get away, it seemed. There had appeared no hope of escape till then. The pursuers were scarcely two hundred yards behind now. In any case the contraband must be captured, he knew, and far better to let it be captured without him, he thought.

In an instant he was hurriedly knotting the rough cords by which he bound the "pattens," or mud-shoes, to his feet. He did not speak. In fact, there was no time for words. He just nodded his assent, swung himself outboard, and splashed his way off with great sucking strides in the direction which the Squire had said the wounded geese had taken. He knew the mud-locked pool the gentleman meant well enough—had often shot duck there himself; but he did not pause beside it; he fled straight on towards land. In a few seconds his slim, bent form merged into the deepening fog, and he vanished utterly, swallowed up in the hazy pall and the fine, smothering silence of the night.

In his hurry he had not paused to think—which was just as well, perhaps, for had he done so, he must have remembered that he had not heard the report of the Squire's gun at all, and he could not have avoided hearing it if that gentleman had fired.

As for the Squire, long before Dobson was out of sight he was already feeling purposefully in the wild-fowler's punt, and removing with incredible swiftness the cases of cartridges to his own. The Squire's punt, be it said, was different from Dobson's in that there were lockers—secret lockers, opened only by a spring—filling the whole of the turtle-back space fore and aft. In these places he hid the cases of cartridges. Then, with a titanic blow of his gun-butt, he drove a hole clean through the bottom of Dobson's punt and sank it in a deep pool in the channel which he knew of from often having caught some large fish in that very spot; for, next to shooting, he loved fishing better than anything. Three huge stones taken from the mud around he placed in the well where Dobson sat to row, in order to keep the punt down. It was thus submerged completely, hidden from view, and would remain so in the hole even at low tide.

Then the Squire swung his own punt slantways across the channel, fired two shots into the air at nothing, pulled two dead wild duck out from under his seat and placed them in the water, and, with great deliberation and much flapping of the dead ducks' wings, began to retrieve them, for all the world as if he had only just shot them.

The face of the coast guardsman leaning over the bow of the surging cutter turned suddenly blank, and his jaw fell, as the cutter fairly barged into the long shadow of the Squire's punt.

Mr. Fox, at the tiller, stood up, cursing aloud, and the water about them boiled and bubbled as the coast guards, straining on frantically backing oars, sought to check the wild course of the cutter—those oars, at least, which were not lifted straight on end to clear the punt grinding and scraping alongside.

Then the Squire's fair-bearded face peered over the gunwale of the cutter. It was purple, and for the moment speechless—this was a very angry Squire that glared upon them.

"What in thunder are you up to, Fox?" he roared at last.

Mr. Fox stifled his curses hurriedly. "But—but Dobson? Haven't you seen him, sir? He was running contraband—arms. At least, I believe it was Dobson, and I know he came up here," he cried.

"Seen him? No. Confound you and your Dobsons and your contraband-running!" the Squire bellowed. "You've ruined my brand-new punt with your fly-by-night tricks. I shall make the Admiralty pay for it—what? Seen the man? No. Hang the man and you, too, sir! Suppose he's slipped out on the mud."

And the Squire appeared to be in imminent danger of there and then having an apoplectic fit—so much so, in fact, that it took the unfortunate officer at least fifteen minutes to soothe the wrathful magnate, and to get him to understand the delicacy of the situation. By which time, of course, Dobson was safely in hiding.

When at last the Squire did appear to grasp things, he was, as Fox put it, too much the other way. He was all for hunting every suspected man down to his cottage and arresting him there and then, and the unfortunate Fox had to waste ten more valuable minutes explaining that, unless they could find Dobson on his punt with arms upon it, they had no evidence that the law would acknowledge at all. Finally, therefore, half an hour was wasted before they could manage to persuade the Squire to return to his mansion, and were left free to continue their man-hunt—and it was by then, of course, too late to hope for success.

Dobson remained in hiding for a week; but when it became quite evident that nothing was known of his little escapade, and that no one had any legal grounds for suspicion against him, he reappeared in the world again. What on earth could have happened to the punt and the cartridges was to him an utter enigma.

It was about a fortnight after that, and Dobson had already drawn his share of the profits from contraband-running, which was sufficient to keep him in comfort for the rest of his days, when it became known in the village of Quigley Harbour that Squire Quigley had let his mansion and estate for four years, and would travel abroad.

Dobson, still excited as a schoolboy over his luck, found occasion to journey fifteen miles by train to Portsmouth on the day Squire Quigley was booked to take his departure "for forren parts." Dobson was going to invest in "one o' them new-fangled, 'igh-power, breech-loadin' wild-fowl guns," for he meant now to indulge in fowling, not for a living as heretofore, but by way of sport.

He happened to return in the London train, and as he alighted at Travant Junction—the nearest station to Quigley Harbour—he stepped from his carriage full into the bustle attending the departing Squire. That gentleman, it would seem, was about to journey to London in order to catch the night mail for the Continent. He was surrounded by all the proper accompaniment of valet with dressing-case, footmen with rugs, station-master bowing at the door of his first-class carriage, as may be expected to surround such a fine figure of a man as he looked in his gigantic fur-lined coat.

He did not appear to see the lean little figure of Dobson as he brushed past him. Nor had Dobson any desire to be seen; he wanted to get out of it quickly, and he had good reasons. Thus it happened that when the Squire turned with his hand on the window-strap and one foot on the footboard of his first-class compartment, and called him by name, Dobson acquired a sudden deafness, and did his best to evaporate. One cannot, however, pretend to ignore the stentorian voice of a gentleman six feet two inches tall, and weighing sixteen stone, in a crowded public place for long, before a dozen people draw one's attention to the fact.

"Stiletto" Dobson came back reluctantly, and his heart seemed to get up in his throat and choke him. "All up," he said to himself, " 'E's bin playin' wid me."

The Squire's smile, however, as he turned to Dobson after dismissing his retinue, was scarcely the smile of a foe. He pulled a visiting-card from his pocket and held it out to the marshman. "Do you know who that man is?" he said quietly.

Dobson gave an odd gasp, as if someone had stabbed him in the ribs, and was dumb. All the wrinkles about his weather-beaten face seemed suddenly to deepen and cry aloud to be noticed. His eyes widened, and in them was the look which one may see in the eyes of a trapped wild animal, and in the sudden stiffening of his limbs he also resembled a captured beast. He made no reply, but stared dumbly at the card, for on it was no name at all, but only, in bold black, the design of a treble-barbed arrow. It was the sign of his chief.

"I will tell you who that man is, my friend," the Squire continued, after a long pause. "It is the man who saved you when you sold me a basket of smuggled tobacco for a basket of eels; who turned the coast guards from the right scent that night you were captured in the oyster-shed; and who saved you in your last venture of all, when you left your punt full of rifle-cartridges with me and went looking for wild-geese. There were no geese, my friend——"

At that moment the guard's whistle sounded, and Squire Quigley got into his carriage and shut the door.

"Do you know the name of that man?" he asked almost in a whisper, bending out, his mouth close to Dobson's ear.

"I suppose ye're goin' t' 'ave me arrested whatever I sez," Dobson snapped, as a trapped beast would snap. "But I don't knaw 'oo the man is, an' if I did I shouldn't tell ye."

The train was moving now. Dobson, without thinking about it, was running in order to keep up with the Squire's carriage, and he remembers noting with a sinking heart that a policeman stood beside the ticket-collector between him and liberty. Every instant he expected the Squire to give the word for his arrest; but instead he only leant out of the window, and shutting one eye, smiled. It was the countersign of the smugglers.

"BARTIMEUS"

(1886– .)

"BARTIMEUS" (the pseudonym of Paymaster-Commander L. A. da Costa Ricci, R.N.) has written, almost exclusively, naval stories. Among his books are *Naval Occasions* (1914), *The Long Trick* (1917), *An Awfully Big Adventure* (1919), and *Seaways* (1923).

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CRAB-POTS

IN moments of crisis the disciplined human mind works as a thing detached, refusing to be hurried or flustered by outward circumstance. Time and its artificial divisions it does not acknowledge. It is concerned with preposterous details and with the ludicrous, and it is acutely solicitous of other people's welfare, whilst working at a speed mere electricity could never attain.

Thus with James Thorogood, Lieutenant, Royal Navy, when he—

together with his bath, bedding, clothes, and scanty cabin furniture, revolver, first-aid outfit, and all the things that were his—was precipitated through his cabin door across the aft-deck. The ship heeled violently, and the stunning sound of the explosion died away amid the uproar of men's voices along the mess-deck and the tinkle and clatter of broken crockery in the wardroom pantry.

"Torpedoed!" said James, and was in his conjecture entirely correct. He emerged from beneath the debris of his possessions, shaken and bruised, and was aware that the aft-deck (that spacious vestibule giving admittance on either side to officers' cabins, and normally occupied by a solitary Marine sentry) was filled with figures rushing past him towards the hatchway.

It was half-past seven in the morning. The Morning-watch had been relieved and were dressing. The Middle-watch, of which James had been one, were turning out after a brief three-hours' spell of sleep. Officers from the bathroom, girt in towels, wardroom servants who had been laying the table for breakfast, one or two Warrant-officers in sea boots and monkey jackets—the Watch-below, in short—appeared and vanished from his field of vision like figures on a screen. In no sense of the word, however, did the rush resemble a panic. The aft-deck had seen greater haste on all sides in a scramble on deck to cheer a troopship passing the cruiser's escort. But the variety of dress and undress, the expressions of grim anticipation in each man's face as he stumbled over the uneven deck, set Thorogood's reeling mind, as it were, upon its feet.

The Surgeon, pyjama clad, a crimson streak running diagonally across the lather on his cheek, suddenly appeared crawling on all-fours through the doorway of his shattered cabin. "I always said those safety-razors were rotten things," he observed ruefully. "I've just carved my initials on my face. And my ankle's broken. Have we been torpedoed, or what, at all? An' what game is it you're playing under that bath, James? Are you pretending to be an oyster?"

Thorogood pulled himself together and stood up. "I think one of their submarines must have bagged us." He nodded across the flat to where, beyond the wrecked debris of three cabins, the cruiser's side gaped open to a clear sky and a line of splashing waves. Overhead on deck the twelve-pounders were barking out a series of ear-splitting reports—much as a terrier might yap defiance at a cobra over the stricken body of its master.

"I think our number's up, old thing." Thorogood bent and slipped his arms under the Surgeon's body. "Shove your arms round my neck. . . . Steady!—hurt you? Heave! Up we go!" A Midshipman, ascending the hatchway, paused and turned back. Then he ran towards them, spattering through the water that had already invaded the flat.

"Still!" sang a bugle on deck. There was an instant's lull in the stampede of feet overhead. The voices of the officers calling orders were silent. The only sounds were the lapping of the waves along the riven hull and the intermittent reports of the quickfirers. Then came the shrill squeal of the pipes.

"Fall in!" roared a voice down the hatchway. "Clear lower deck! Every soul on deck!" The bugle rang out again.

Thorogood staggered with his burden across the buckled plating of the flat, and reached the hatchway. The Midshipman who had turned back passed him, his face white and set. "Here!" called the Lieutenant from the bottom of the ladder. "This way, my son! Fall in's the order!" For a moment the boy glanced back irresolute across the flat, now ankle deep in water. The electric light had been extinguished, and in the greenish gloom between decks he looked a small and very forlorn figure. He pointed towards the wreckage of the after-cabin, called something inaudible, and, turning, was lost to view aft.

"That's the 'Pay's' cabin," said the Doctor between his teeth. "He was a good friend to that little lad. I suppose the boy's gone to look for him, and the 'Pay' as dead as a haddock, likely as not."

Thorogood deposited the Surgeon on the upper deck, fetched a lifebuoy, and rammed it over the injured man's shoulders. "God forgive me for taking it," said the latter gratefully, "but my fibula's cracked to blazes, an' I love my wife . . ."

All round them men were working furiously with knives and crowbars, casting off lashings from boats and baulks of timber on the booms, wrenching doors and woodwork from their fastenings—anything capable of floating and supporting a swimmer. The officers were encouraging the men with words and example, steadying them with cheery catch-words of their Service, ever with an eye on the forebridge, at the extreme end of which the Captain was standing.

On the after shelter-deck the Gunner, bareheaded and clad only in a shirt and trousers, was, single-handed, loading and firing a twelve-pounder as fast as he could snap the breech to and lay the gun. His face was distorted with rage, and his black brows met across his nose in a scowl that at any other time would have suggested acute melodrama. Half a mile away the shots were striking the water with little pillars of white spray.

The figure on the forebridge made a gesture with his arm. "Fall in!" shouted the Commander. "Fall in, facing outboard, and strip! Stand by to swim for it!" Seven hundred men—bluejackets, stokers, and marines—hurriedly formed up and began to divest themselves of their clothes. They were drawn up regardless of class or rating, and a burly Marine Artilleryman, wriggling out of his cholera belt, laughed in the blackened face of a stoker fresh from the furnace door.

"Cheer up, mate!" he said encouragingly. "You'll soon 'ave a chance to wash your bloomin' face!"

The ship gave a sudden lurch, settled deeper in the water, and began to heel slowly over. The Captain, clinging to the bridge rail to maintain his balance, raised the megaphone to his mouth:

"Carry on!" he shouted. "Every man for himself!"—he lowered the megaphone and added between his teeth—"and God for us all!"

The ship was lying over at an angle of sixty degrees, and the men were clustered along the bulwarks and nettings as if loath to leave their stricken home even at the eleventh hour. A muscular Leading Seaman was the first to go—a nude, pink figure, wading reluctantly down the sloping side of the cruiser, for all the world like a child paddling. He stopped when waist deep and looked back. " 'Ere!" he shouted, " 'ow far is it to Yarmouth? No more'n a 'undred an' fifty miles, is it? I gotter aunt livin' there. . . ."

Then came the rush, together with a roar of voices, shouts and cheers, cries for help, valiant, quickly stifled snatches of "Tipperary," and, over all, the hiss of escaping steam.

"She wouldn't be 'arf pleased to see yer, Nobby!" shouted a voice above the hubbub. "Not 'arf she wouldn't! Nah then, 'oo's for compulsory bathin'. . . . Gawd! ain't it cold! . . ."

How he found himself in the water, Thorogood had no very clear recollection; but by instinct he struck out through the welter of gasping, bobbing heads till he was clear of the clutching menace of the drowning. The Commander, clad simply in his wrist watch and uniform cap, was standing on the balsa raft, with scores of men hanging to its support. "Get away from the ship!" he was bawling at the full strength of his lungs. "Get clear before she goes——!"

The stern of the cruiser rose high in the air, and she dived with sickening suddenness into the grey vortex of waters. Pitiful cries for help sounded on all sides. Two cutters and a few hastily constructed rafts were piled with survivors; others swam to and fro, looking for floating debris, or floated, reserving their strength.

The cries and shouts grew fewer.

Thorogood had long parted with his support—the broken loom of an oar—and was floating on his back, when he found himself in close proximity to two figures clinging to an empty breaker. One he recognised as a Midshipman, the other was a bearded Chief Stoker. The boy's teeth were chattering and his face was blue with cold.

"W-w-what were you g-g-g-oing to have for b-b-b-breakfast in your m-m-mess?" he was asking his companion in misfortune.

Hang it all, a fellow of fifteen had to show somehow he wasn't afraid of dying.

"Kippers," replied the Chief Stoker, recognising his part and playing up to it manfully. "I'm partial to a kipper, meself—an' fat 'am. . . ."

The Midshipman caught sight of Thorogood, and raised an arm in greeting. As he did so a sudden spasm of cramp twisted his face like a mask. He relaxed his grasp of the breaker and sank instantly.

The two men reappeared half a minute later empty-handed, and clung to the barrel exhausted.

"It's all chalked up somewhere, I suppose," spluttered James, gasping for his breath."

"Child murder, sir, I reckon that is," was the tense reply. "That's on their slop ticket all right. . . . 'Kippers,' I sez, skylarkin' like . . . an' 'e sinks like a stone. . . ."

Among the wavetops six hundred yards away a slender, upright object turned in a wide circle and moved slowly northward. To the south a cluster of smoke spirals appeared above the horizon, growing gradually more distinct. The party in one of the cutters raised a wavering cheer.

"Cheer up for Chatham!" shouted a clear voice across the grey waste of water. "Here come the destroyers! . . . Stick it, my hearties!"

After a month's leave James consulted a specialist. He was a very wise man, and his jerky discourse concerned shocked nerve-centres and reflex actions. "That's all right," interrupted the thoroughly startled James (sometime wing three-quarter for the United Services XV), "but what defeats me is not being able to cross a London street without 'coming over all of a tremble'! An' when I try to light a cigarette"—he extended an unsteady hand—"look! . . . I'm as fit as a fiddle, really. Only the Medical Department won't pass me for service afloat. An' I want to get back, d'you see? There's a super-Dreadnaught commissioning soon——"

The specialist wrote cabalistic signs on a piece of paper. "Bracing climate—East Coast for preference. . . . Plenty of exercise. Walk. Fresh air. Early hours. Come and see me again in a fortnight, and get this made up. That's all right"—he waved aside James's proffered guineas. "Don't accept fees from naval or military. . . . Least we can do is to mend you quickly. 'Morning. . . ."

James descended the staircase, and passed a tall, lean figure in soiled khaki ascending, whom the public (together with his wife and family) had every reason to suppose at that moment in the neighbourhood of Ypres.

"If it weren't for those fellows I couldn't be here," was his greeting to the specialist. He jerked his grey, close-cropped head towards the door through which Thorogood had just passed.

II

A RAMSHACKLE covered cart laden with an assortment of tinware had stopped on the outskirts of the village. The owner, a bent scarecrow of a fellow, was effecting repairs to his nag's harness with a piece of string. Evening was setting in, and the southeast wind swept a grey haze across the coast road and sombre marshes. The tinker completed first-aid to the harness, and stood at the front of the cart to light his lamps. The first match blew out, and he came closer to the body of the vehicle for shelter from the wind.

At that moment a pedestrian passed, humming a little tune to himself, striding along through the November murk with swinging gait. It may have been that his voice, coming suddenly within range of the mare's ears, conveyed a sound of encouragement. Perhaps the lights of the village, twinkling out one by one along the street, suggested stables and a nosebag. Anyhow, the tinker's nag threw her weight suddenly into the collar, the wheel of the cart passed over the tinker's toe, and the tinker uttered a sudden exclamation.

In the circumstances it was a pardonable enough ebullition of feeling and ought not to have caused the passing pedestrian to spin round on his heel, astonishment on every line of his face. The next moment, however, he recovered himself. "Did you call out to me?" he shouted.

The tinker was nursing his toe, apparently unconscious of having given anyone more food for thought than usual. "No," he replied gruffly. "I 'urt myself."

The passer-by turned and pursued his way to the village. The tinker lit his lamps and followed. He was a retiring sort of tinker, and employed no flamboyant methods to advertise his wares. He jingled through the village without attracting any customers—or apparently desiring to attract any—and followed the sandy coast road for some miles.

At length he pulled up, and from his seat on the off-shaft sat motionless for a minute, listening. The horse, as if realising that its dreams of a warm stable were dreams indeed, hung its head dejectedly, and in the faint gleam of the lamp its breath rose in thin vapour. The man descended from his perch on the shaft and, going to his nag's head, turned the cart off the road.

For some minutes the man and horse stumbled through the darkness; the cart jolted, and the tin merchandise rattled dolefully. The tinker, true to the traditions of his calling, swore again. Then he found what he had been looking for, an uneven track that wound among the sand-dunes towards the shore. The murmur of the sea became suddenly loud and distinct.

With a jerk the horse and cart came to a standstill. In a leisurely fashion the tinker unharnessed his mare, tied a nosebag on her, and tethered her to the tail of the cart. In the same deliberate manner he rummaged about among his wares till he produced a bundle of sticks and some pieces of turf. With these under his arm, he scrambled off across the sand-hills to the sea.

The incoming tide sobbed and gurgled along miniature headlands of rock that stretched out on either side of a little bay. The sand-hills straggled down almost to high-water mark, where the winter storms had piled a barrier of kelp and debris. At one place a rough track down to the shingle had been worn in the sand by the feet of fishermen using the cove in fine weather during the summer.

The tinker selected a site for his fire in a hollow that opened to the sea. He built a hearth with flat stones, fetched a kettle from the cart, kindled the fire, and busied himself with preparations for his evening meal. This concluded, he laid a fresh turf of peat upon the embers, banked the sand up all round till the faint glow was invisible a few yards distant, and lit a pipe.

The night wore on. Every now and again the man rose, climbed a sand-hill, and stood listening, returning each time to his vigil by the fire. At length he leaned forward and held the face of his watch near the fire-glow. Apparently the time had come for action of some sort, for he rose and made off into the darkness. When he reappeared he carried a tin pannikin in his hand, and stood motionless by the fire, staring out to sea.

Ten minutes he waited: then, suddenly, he made an inaudible observation. A light appeared out of the darkness beyond the headland, winked twice, and vanished. The tinker approached his fire and swilled something from his pannikin on to the glowing embers. A flame shot up about three feet, and died down, flickering. The tin contained paraffin, and three times the tinker repeated the strange rite. Then he sat down and waited.

A quarter of an hour passed before something grated on the shingle of the beach, scarcely perceptible above the lap of the waves. The tinker rose to his feet, shovelled the sand over the embers of his fire, and descended the little path to the beach. The night was inky dark, and for a moment he paused irresolute. Then a dark form appeared against the faintly luminous foam, wading knee deep and dragging the bows of a small skiff towards the shore. The tinker gave a low whistle, and the wader paused.

"*Fritz!*" he said guardedly.

"*Ja! Hier!*" replied the tinker, advancing.

"*Gott sei dank!*" said the other. He left the boat and waded ashore. The two men shook hands. "Where's the cart?" asked the low voice in German.

"Among the sand-hills. You will want assistance. Have you more than one with you in the boat?"

"Yes." The newcomer turned and gave a brusque order. Another figure waded ashore and joined the two men, a tall, bearded fellow in duffel overalls. As his feet reached the sand he spat ostentatiously. The tinker led the way to the cart.

"It is dark," said the first man from the sea. "How many cans have you got?"

"Forty-eight. I could get no more without exciting suspicion. They have requisitioned one of my cars as it is."

The other gave a low laugh. "What irony! Well, that will last till Friday. But you must try and get more then. I will be here at the same time; no, the tide will not suit—at 3 A.M. We can come inside then. Did you remember the cigarettes?"

"Yes." The tinker climbed into the cart and handed a petrol tin down to the speaker. *"Ein!"* he said. "Count them," and lifted out another. *"Zwei!"* The third man, who had not hitherto spoken, received them with a grunt, and set off down to the boat with his burden.

Eight times the trio made the journey to and from the beach. Three times they waited while the tiny collapsible boat ferried its cargo out to where, in the darkness, a long, black shadow lay, with the water lapping round it, like a partly submerged whale. The last time the tinker remained alone on the beach.

He stood awhile staring out into the darkness, and at length turned to retrace his steps. As he reached the shelter of the sand-dunes a tall shadow rose out of the ground at his feet, and the next instant he was writhing on his face in the grip of an exceedingly effective neck-and-arm lock.

"If you try to kick, my pippin," said the excited voice of James Thorogood, "I shall simply break your arm—so!"

The face in the sand emitted a muffled squark.

"Keep still, then."

The two men breathed heavily for a minute.

"Don't swear, either. That's what got you into this trouble, that deplorable habit of swearing aloud in German. But I will say, for a tinker, you put a very neat West Country whipping on that bit of broken harness. I've been admiring it. Didn't know they taught you that in the German navy—*don't* wriggle."

III

JAMES THOROGOOD, retaining a firm hold on his companion's arm, bent down and gathered a handful of loose earth from a flower-bed at his feet. The moonlight, shining fitfully through flying clouds, illumined the face of the old house and the two road-stained figures standing under its walls. It was a lonely, rambling building, partly sheltered from the prevailing wind by a clump of poplars, and looking out down an avenue bordered by untidy rhododendrons.

"Won't Uncle Bill be pleased!" said James, and flung his handful of earth with relish against one of the windowpanes on the first floor. He and his captive waited in silence for some minutes; then he repeated the assault. Soon a light wavered behind the curtains, the sash lifted, and a head and shoulders appeared.

"Hallo!" said a man's voice.

"Uncle Bill!" called James. There was a moment's silence.

"Well?" said the voice again, patiently.

"Uncle Bill! It's me—Jim. Will you come down and open the door? And don't wake Janet, whatever you do." Janet was the housekeeper, stone deaf these fifteen years.

The head and shoulders disappeared. Again the light flickered, grew dim, and vanished. "This way," said James, and led his companion round an angle of the house into the shadow of the square Georgian porch. The bolts were being withdrawn as they reached the steps, and a tall, grey-haired man in a dressing-gown opened the door. He held a candle above his head and surveyed the wayfarers through a rimless monocle.

"Didn't expect you till to-morrow," was his laconic greeting. "Brought a friend?"

"He's not a friend exactly," said James, pushing his companion in through the door, and examining him curiously by the light of the candle. "But I'll tell you all about him later on. His name's Fritz. D'you mind if I lock him in the cellar?"

"Do," replied Uncle Bill dryly. He produced a bunch of keys from the pocket of his dressing-gown. "It's the thin brass key. There's some quite decent brandy in the farthest bin on the right-hand side, if you're thinking of making a night of it down there. Take the candle; I'm going back to bed."

"Don't go to bed," called James from the head of the stairs. "I want to have a yarn with you in a minute. Light the gas in the dining-room."

Five minutes later he reappeared carrying a tray with cold beef, bread, and a jug of beer upon it. Uncle Bill stood in front of the dead ashes of his hearth considering his nephew through his eyeglass. "I hope you made—er—Fritz comfortable? You look as if you had been doing a forced march. Nerves better?"

James set down his empty glass with a sigh and wiped his mouth. "As comfortable as he deserves to be. He's a spy, Uncle Bill. I caught him supplying petrol to a German submarine."

"Really?" said Uncle Bill, without enthusiasm. "That brandy cost me 18os. a dozen. Wouldn't he be better in a police station? Have you informed the Admiralty?"

"I venerate the police," replied James flippantly, "and the Admiralty are as a father and mother to me; but I want to keep this absolutely quiet for a few days—anyhow, till after Friday. I couldn't turn Fritz over to a policeman without attracting a certain amount of attention. Anyhow,. it would leak out if I did. I've walked eighteen miles already since midnight, and it's another fifty-nine to the Admiralty from here. Besides, unless I disguise Fritz as a performing bear, people would want to know why I was leading him about on a rope's end——"

"Start at the beginning," interrupted Uncle Bill wearily, "and explain, avoiding all unnecessary detail."

So James, between mouthfuls, gave a brief *résumé* of the night's adventure, while Sir William Thorogood, Professor of Chemistry and Adviser to the Admiralty on Submarine Explosives, stood and shivered on the hearthrug.

"And it just shows," concluded his nephew, "what a three hours' swim in the North Sea does for a chap's morals." He eyed his Uncle Bill solemnly. "I even chucked the fellow's seamanship in his teeth!"

Sir William polished his eyeglass with a silk handkerchief and replaced it with care.

"*Did* you!" he said.

IV

A SQUAT tub of a boat, her stern piled high with wicker crab-pots, came round the northern headland and entered the little bay. The elderly fisherman who was rowing rested on his oars and sat contemplating the crab-pots in the stern. A younger man, clad in a jersey and sea boots, was busy coiling down something in the bows. "How about this spot," he said presently, looking up over his shoulder, "for the first one?" The rower fumbled about inside his tattered jacket, produced something that glistened in the sunlight, and screwed it into his eye.

"Uncle Bill!" protested the younger fisherman, "do unship that thing. If there *is* anyone watching us, it will give the whole show away."

Sir William Thorogood surveyed the harbour with an expressionless countenance. "I consider that having donned these unsavoury garments—did Janet bake them thoroughly, by the way?—I have already forfeited my self-respect quite sufficiently. How much of the circuit have you got off the drum?"

"Six fathoms."

"That's enough for the first, then." The speaker rose, lifted a crab-pot with an effort, and tipped it over the side of the boat. The cable whizzed out over the gunwale for a few seconds and stopped. Uncle Bill resumed paddling for a little distance, and repeated the manœuvre eight times in a semicircle round the inside of the bay, across the entrance. "That's enough," he observed at length, as the last crab-pot sank with a splash. "Don't want to break all their windows ashore. These will do all they're intended to." He propelled the boat towards the shore, while James paid out the weighted cable. The bows of the boat grated on the shingle, and the elder man climbed out. "Hand me the battery and the firing key—in that box under the thwart there. Now bring the end of the cable along."

As they toiled up the shifting flank of a sand-dune, James indicated a charred spot in the sand. "That's where he showed the flare, Uncle Bill."

Uncle Bill nodded disinterestedly. Side by side they topped the tufted crest of the dune and vanished among the sand-hills.

Somewhere across the marshes a church clock was striking midnight when a big covered car pulled up at the roadside in the spot where, a few nights before, the tinker's cart had turned off among the sand-hills. The driver switched the engine off and extinguished the lights. Two men emerged from the body of the car; one, a short, thick-set figure muffled in a Naval overcoat, stamped up and down to restore his circulation. "Is this the place?" he asked.

"Part of it," replied the voice of Uncle Bill from the driving seat. "My nephew will show you the rest. I shall stay here, if Jim doesn't mind handing me the Thermos flask and my cigar-case—thanks."

James walked round the rear of the car and began groping about in the dry ditch at the roadside.

"Don't say you can't find it, Jim," said Sir William. He bent forward to light his cigar, and the flare of the match shone on his dress shirt-front and immaculate white tie. He refastened his motoring coat, and leaned back puffing serenely.

"Got it!" said a voice from the ditch, and James reappeared, carrying a small box and trailing something behind him. He held it out to the short man with gold oak leaves round his cap-peak. His hand trembled slightly.

"Here's the firing key, sir!"

"Oh, thanks. Let's put it in the stern-sheets of the car till I come back. I'd like to have a look at the spot."

"You'll get your boots full of sand," said Uncle Bill's voice under the hood.

James lifted a small sack and an oil-can out of the motor, and the two figures vanished side by side into the night.

Half an hour later the elder man reappeared. "He's going to blow a whistle," he observed, and climbed into the body of the car, where Sir William was now sitting under a pile of rugs. He made room for the newcomer.

"Have some rug . . . and here's the foot-warmer. . . . I see. And then you—er—do the rest? The box is on the seat beside you."

The other settled down into his seat and tucked the rug round himself. "Thanks," was the grim reply. "Yes, I'll do the rest!" He lit a pipe, and smoked in silence, as if following a train of thought. "My boy would have been sixteen to-morrow. . . ."

"Ah!" said Uncle Bill.

An hour passed. The Naval man refilled and lit another pipe. By the light of the match he examined his watch. "I suppose you tested the contacts?" he asked at length in a low voice.

"Yes," was the reply, and they lapsed into silence again. The other shifted his position slightly and raised his head, staring into the darkness beyond the road whence came the faint, continuous murmur of the sea.

Seaward a faint gleam of light threw into relief for an instant the dark outline of a sand-dune, and sank into obscurity again.

Uncle Bill's eyeglass dropped against the buttons of his coat with a tinkle. The grim, silent man beside him lifted something on to his knees, and there was a faint click like the safety-catch of a gun being released.

A frog in the ditch near by set up a low, meditative croaking. Uncle Bill raised his head abruptly. Their straining ears caught the sound of someone running, stumbling along the uneven track that wound in from the shore. A whistle cut the stillness like a knife.

There was a hoarse rumble seaward that broke into a deafening roar, and was succeeded by a sound like the bursting of a dam. The car rocked with the concussion, and the fragments of the shattered windscreen tinkled down over the bonnet and footboard.

Then utter, absolute silence.

STEPHEN McKENNA

(1888–   )

STEPHEN McKENNA'S first books were *The Reluctant Lover* (1912), and *Sheila Intervenes* (1913). *Sonia* (1917) brought him much popularity, which his subsequent novels, usually dealing with the upper classes, have preserved to him.

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PANDORA'S BOX

WHEN the news came to Antibes that Henry Morgan, the Paris manager of Scropes, had been found dead in his bed, Paula Daventry hid the *Continental Daily Mail* for fear of exciting her husband with hopes which would almost certainly be disappointed. The Paris office, even without the contrast of Leeds, where he had served his apprenticeship, and Manchester, which he now ruled, was Arthur's dream; and the dream might reasonably have been expected to come true in another five years' time. At present, however, old Mr. Scrope would say that he was too young.

Perhaps, too, he would ordain that Arthur must not be given harder work and greater responsibility until his health was more dependable. When the directors came to review Morgan's possible successors, the general manager would inevitably repeat the warning which he had issued when the Berlin branch became vacant: "Daventry? The ideal man if we could trust him not to break down, but he has to go south every winter. . . ." And then Arthur, who could not resign himself to being even intermittently an invalid, would fume and fret till his temperature raced up and the doctor from Cannes grumbled that their weeks at the Villa Montcalm had done him less than no good. Paula thrust the *Daily Mail* from sight, hoping vaguely that the death of Henry Morgan and the promotion of his successor would be ancient and inoffensive history by the time that Arthur's benevolent uncle came back to the villa which he had lent them and they in turn went sadly north to the lingering remains of the English winter.

It would be foolish, Paula reflected, to ruin their last ten days in this paradise of sunshine and spring flowers by repeating dismally how much they both hated the black industrial north and how cheerfully they would sell their souls for a transfer to Paris or even Milan. If they were too young for promotion, they were at least young enough to enjoy themselves; and, if Arthur had to be packed abroad every winter, they were blessed in having kindly relations to provide them with house, garden, servants, food and wine. For a fortnight they had been enjoying a second honeymoon. After a late breakfast they would drift into Cannes to spend happy hours sunning themselves on the Croisette or staring at the shops in the Rue d'Antibes. At noon they repaired to the Galeries Fleuries and sat, sipping their cocktails, at a little table between the bands until it was time to return home for luncheon. In the afternoon they played lawn-tennis; in the evening they danced or gambled mildly at the Casino. Already the shadow of coming departure was falling on them as they reckoned wistfully that they had been away for so many days and that only so many days more remained. One did not want to deepen the shadow by reiterating that, if only they could succeed the Morgans, they would be exchanging the spring of the Riviera for the spring of Paris.

"Let's be thankful for what we have," Paula counselled herself. "Of course, if by some miracle . . ."

She interrupted her musing at a cry from Arthur, whom she had left breakfasting on his verandah in sunshine that was hot at nine o'clock in the morning and scented with a creamy blend of pine-trees and mimosa.

"Read that!" he called out indignantly, fluttering a letter before her. "Old Scrope, of all people, wants to come *here!* He's had to give up his room at Cannes and he can't get another one. Will we put him up for a week? He's booked his place on the 'Blue' for Saturday . . ."

II

PAULA felt her heart thumping. As a friend of the Peter Daventrys, old Mr. Scrope had stayed at the Villa Montcalm in the past. It was natural enough that he should propose himself again, natural that he should billet himself on one of his managers and natural that his request—with the reason which he gave for it—should mean precisely what he said, no less and no more. At the same time, it was impossible to dissociate it from the news in that morning's *Daily Mail.* A man like Mr. Scrope was not usually hunted out of one hotel or refused accommodation at another. Far more likely it seemed that he was coming on business: not, of course, to *offer* them anything (Paula felt that, if only they kept their heads, they would have no reason to be disappointed afterwards), but to remind himself what sort of man Arthur was, to see what sort of health he was in. . . .

Paula read with pursed lips and narrowed eyes. The old gentleman wrote with an engaging mixture of courtesy and firmness: though he understood that they were themselves the guests of his old friends Peter and Margaret Daventry, he must not impose on their good nature and he would therefore be obliged if he might contribute to the expenses of the villa. He was more than anxious to meet Mrs. Arthur Daventry ("It *doesn't* mean anything!" Paula whispered, "but the Paris manager has to entertain tremendously and they must be sure that I don't squint or eat peas with a knife . . ."), but he could promise them that he would not be a nuisance. Indeed, if they could supply him with bed, breakfast and dinner, he would leave them in peace all day.

"Of course we must say we shall be delighted," Paula answered.

He was proposing himself, she observed, for a date when they had been asked to dine at the Ambassadeurs; and she had to make Arthur see that the engagement must be cancelled without leading him to build extravagant hopes on Mr. Scrope's visit.

"It's a bit cool," her easily ruffled husband was still grumbling. "We don't want him. If I didn't happen to be a subordinate in his precious business, he wouldn't dare to ask himself like this . . . I propose to say that we're very sorry, but the villa's full . . ."

Paula shook her head with a determination that left no room for argument.

"You can't do that! He may want to talk business; and it would be a black mark against you if you wouldn't take the trouble to meet him."

"There can't be any business to discuss when we've both been away from our offices for several weeks."

"One never knows." Paula decided that her husband must be discreetly forearmed. "I don't suggest that there's anything in it, but he might conceivably want to sound you about a transfer. I don't suppose you've seen that Mr. Morgan died two days ago . . ."

Arthur Daventry sprang to his feet and looked about him for a newspaper.

"*Henry* Morgan?" he asked.

"Yes. Of course we shan't be offered Paris; but, if there's general post, we might get Vienna. We must impress Mr. Scrope favourably."

Arthur looked with shining eyes at his flushed and pretty young wife. Then he smiled and caught her to him.

"You'll have to vamp our worthy chairman," he informed her. "Your smartest clothes and your most schoolgirlish complexion. We must do him well, too. Tell Jeanne that fortunes hang on her every omelette. I must talk to Wilson about the cellar. I hope to goodness Uncle Peter left some decent champagne. Wilson!" he shouted in the direction of the pantry. "We shall want some cigars, too," he continued in rising excitement. "D'you think he'll bring his own car, or shall I try to hire one? We must keep him amused . . ."

Paula shook her head and conducted her husband back to the table on which his neglected coffee was cooling.

"My dear, that's absolutely the wrong line," she told him. "We aren't millionaires, so we mustn't try to live as such. If you gave him champagne more than once, he'd say we were letting ourselves go in Uncle Peter's absence; he'd think we were extravagant, greedy, not to be trusted with the firm's money for entertaining. I'll look my best, because I must do credit to you and the business, but we must be a steady, quiet, young couple, with simple tastes and no vices." Her eyes clouded for a moment at the vision of the delights which she was foreswearing: there would, for a week, be no parties at the Arménonville, no meeting by the bands in the Galeries gardens, no flutters at the Casino. For a week this second honeymoon would be suspended. The sacrifice, however, was worth while if the Paris office were the prize. "I'm not sure I oughtn't to give up cigarettes while he's here . . . ," she volunteered, with a sudden rush of virtue to her conscience.

"I'm quite sure you ought to give up cocktails," Arthur put in. "That's just the sort of thing that would shock old Scrope. He's pre-Victorian and in his dotage, I believe, into the bargain."

Paula's jaw fell.

"Arthur, my dear, there are limits to my devotion! If I don't have just one cocktail before dinner . . ."

"Well, you must tell Wilson to bring it you in your room. Oh, good morning, Wilson. I wanted to discuss the state of the cellar. Mr. Scrope, the chairman of my company, will be staying here for a week . . ."

III

The unknown guest, like every stranger, commonly proves to be simultaneously better and worse than he is expected; and old Mr. Scrope, like other guests, gave no kind of trouble where it had been anticipated and, in compensation, threatened every kind of trouble where it had not. Arriving in his own car, which was garaged in Cannes, with a chauffeur who valeted him, he brought only reasonable luggage and carried a pile of books—chosen by himself—under one arm and a wallet of cigars under the other. His first words, spoken to Wilson, were concerned with questions about the hours of meals; and the butler's deferentially repeated "If that will suit you, sir?" was cut short when the old man announced briefly that he ate and drank and went to bed and got up again like other people and that he would fall in with the rules and times of the house.

"So far, so good," Paula whispered to her reflection, as she surveyed the effect of what Arthur called her smartest clothes and most schoolgirlish complexion.

The old man's next words, when Arthur and she hurried forward to welcome their guest, were less reassuring.

"Mrs. Daventry?" grunted Mr. Scrope. "And Daventry? First time we've met, I think, Daventry, though your Uncle Peter's an old friend. Come to think of it, I found you a place in the business to oblige him." Until this moment Arthur had hugged the belief that he owed his position more to an unusually brilliant career at school and college than to nepotism at one remove. The news deflated his confidence in himself; and he was conscious of looking sheepish as Mr. Scrope fumbled for his spectacles and glared up as if to see what sort of bad bargain he had made. "Bless my soul, what a pair of children you are!" the old man grumbled. "I pictured you a round dozen years older."

"Too young at thirty!" Paula told herself. Aloud she said: "Your letter was a delightful surprise, Mr. Scrope. Now, luncheon will be ready in ten minutes. Would you like something first? Vermouth or a cocktail?"

Shaggy, shabby and red-faced, the old man held his steel spectacles in place with a tobacco-stained thumb and forefinger while he regarded her shrewdly from under his bushy eyebrows.

"Having one yourself?" he asked, as though the answer would "place" her once and for all.

"Not if you won't think us unsociable," answered Paula in a formula that seemed neatly to combine native asceticism with diplomatic toleration.

Mr. Scrope seemed faintly disappointed.

"Well, perhaps you're better without it at your age," he mumbled; and Paula felt that she had earned one good mark from the pre-Victorian. "For once in a way I don't mind drinking alone. If you haven't killed yourself by the time you're eighty," he explained with a dissolute chuckle, "you'll find it doesn't much matter what you eat and drink. . . . Are we going to be indoors or outside? If it's indoors, may I finish my cigar? I usually forget to ask now that women smoke all the time and everywhere . . . You don't smoke either? I think you're wise. Smoking is perhaps not the easiest of vices to acquire, but I believe it's the most difficult of all to shake off." Looking critically round the drawing-room, he sat down in one of the only two comfortable chairs and tossed his hat, books and cigars into the other. "Well, I'm not going to talk shop after to-day, but I want you to tell me a little bit about yourself, Daventry. This my cocktail?"

Thereafter, though for a moment she became suddenly tense, Paula felt that she was being relegated, with her new hat and dress, to the background. Before luncheon, during luncheon and after luncheon, Mr. Scrope talked of the history, the politics and the ethics of his business. By teatime, however, his questions had revealed or exposed the range of Arthur's knowledge; and he turned upon her without pity. At seven o'clock, as Paula bit down her craving for a cigarette and sat nonchalantly (but domestically) knitting while Mr. Scrope swallowed a couple of cocktails and lighted yet one more of his cigars, she felt that she had been subjected to as merciless an inquisition as her husband. The house and garden (a Paris manager must have a sense of style), literature and music (his wife must pull her weight at a party), the valorisation of the *franc* and the Combières inquiry (they must both of them be well-informed and at the same time discreet): every avenue of conversation seemed to have been explored by the time that the exhausted host and hostess went up to dress.

"But what he thinks of us," she sighed, "I haven't the least idea. He just watches and puts his questions and smiles to himself. . . . Arthur, I don't know that I can stand a week of this!"

"Then the sooner you begin vamping him the better. I've put up the best show I can. . . . Come in!"

The door was opened cautiously; and Wilson entered, bearing in his arms a band-box with a flourish of black lettering: *Estelle, Galeries Fleuries, Cannes.*

"Mr. Scrope was sitting in the hall, ma'am," he explained; "and, as Mr. Daventry said this had to be done on the q t, in a manner of speaking, I took the liberty . . ."

Carefully removing the lid of the band-box, he extracted two glasses, a tray and a cocktail-shaker.

"Wilson, you're a *genius!*" exclaimed Paula.

"I try to give satisfaction," answered Wilson with dignity. Then, turning to Arthur, he asked: "What wine will you be drinking for dinner, sir?"

It was on the tip of Arthur's tongue to say: "*If ever two human beings deserved a little champagne* . . ." Then he remembered the empty Paris office.

"I think," he answered, "I shall drink Vittel water . . ."

"So shall I," Paula added loyally.

"And you'd better ask Mr. Scrope what he'd like. White wine, whisky-and-soda, champagne . . ."

When the question was repeated an hour later, Mr. Scrope looked first to see what his host and hostess were drinking. He then inquired, with his surface manner of consideration, whether anything was open; and, when Arthur assured him that his uncle's cellar was (he understood) well assorted and that anything within reason could be produced at a moment's notice, he elected for champagne. As there were no pints, he drank a bottle by himself and murmured at short intervals that his young friends really did not know what they were missing.

"Perhaps you're wise, though," he did not fail to add. "If you don't care for wine, it's a pity to cultivate a taste which is undeniably expensive. . . . Now, tell me: what do you do with yourselves in the evenings?"

The question was addressed to Paula; and she immediately suspected a trap. If they pretended that they remained at home, reading or doing cross-word puzzles, Mr. Scrope would label them as socially inadequate; if they admitted to looking in occasionally at the Casino, he might think: "*Frivolous. Pleasure-loving. This gambling . . . One knows how that sort of thing ends.*"

"Here, do you mean?" she asked. "Well, we're taking things very quietly at the moment. Arthur was so much overworked before the doctor sent him away . . ."

"Then you won't mind if I slip in to Cannes for an hour or two?" interrupted Mr. Scrope. "I'm too old for dancing, of course, but I like to look on. A lot of uncommon pretty young women in Cannes this year. I'd have proposed a little spree, if I'd thought it would amuse you, but I don't want your husband's doctor on my back. I shall just try my luck in the Casino. Do you know, I've been coming to the Riviera for the last forty years, not stinting myself either, and I've never yet failed to pay my expenses? . . . You won't wait up for me, will you?"

IV

"THE one thing now wanting," said Paula at midnight, "is that we should discover he isn't Mr. Scrope at all, but an adventurer masquerading in his name."

They were smoking in her bedroom and, desperately and avengingly, sharing a bottle of champagne. The wine, however, when drunk out of tooth-glasses, somehow tasted warm and flat. It was a mild night; and through the open windows of the next villa came the sound of dance-music, played by gramophone. At the Ambassadeurs, the fun would now be at its height.

"*I* feel," said Arthur bitterly, "that the one thing wanting is a confidential report from old Scrope to the board that, while we're a most *worthy* young couple, we're altogether too prim and provincial for the Paris branch."

"I suppose he knows there *is* a branch in Paris," sighed Paula, "and that it's vacant at this moment. From his conversation . . ."

Arthur joined his sigh with hers; and they sat almost without speaking until Paula, surrendering to the fatigues of the day, began to undress. Though Mr. Scrope had been given a latch-key, Arthur felt that it would be not only polite but politic to sit up for his guest; and he was still practising policy and politeness when the old man returned at two o'clock, jubilant with a run of luck that had already paid for half his winter holiday.

"Though I wouldn't invite my worst enemy to gamble," he added, "unless it amuses him. If you don't want to make money and don't like losing it, the whole business must be a purgatory of boredom."

The second day of Mr. Scrope's visit was very similar to the first; the third to the second. In common justice it had to be admitted that their visitor made few demands on his entertainers; but neither Paula nor Arthur could escape the feeling that they were being watched and appraised. And neither had realised the lure of an innocent, conventional pleasure until it was withheld from them. At intervals they stole away in turn to the pine-trees on the Cap and smoked surreptitious cigarettes; their single moment of abandon came each evening when they retired to Paula's bedroom and Wilson entered unsmilingly with a band-box lettered *Estelle, Galeries Fleuries, Cannes*. Before Mr. Scrope's advent, they had, from time to time, criticised the butler's cocktails adversely; but ditchwater would have been sweet if they had felt that they were not supposed to drink it and that they were in some way cheating Mr. Scrope by drinking it without his knowledge.

Not until the fourth night when their guest had made enough money to cover all possible expenses, did he refer again to the business of his company.

"Did you see about poor Morgan's death?" he inquired at the beginning of dinner. "Eh? What's that? What will I drink? I'll take whatever anybody else . . . But I was forgetting you two never touch wine! Well, Daventry, if you have any half-bottles of your uncle's most excellent champagne . . . You haven't? I'm not at all sure I ought to drink a bottle by myself *every* night. However . . . What was I saying? Oh, about Morgan. Now, what did the papers say about that?"

As Paula had destroyed the *Daily Mail* before her husband could read it, she took it upon herself to answer from memory.

"He died in his sleep, I think they said," she recalled. "And it came out that he'd had a bad heart for years."

Mr. Scrope wrinkled his nose and grunted:

"H'm. That's what I *told* 'em to say, of course, but I wanted to know if there'd been any rumours. This is between ourselves: a business confidence," he added for Paula's benefit. "Morgan died of an overdose of some sleeping-stuff; and as he'd got it on a prescription from his doctor . . ."

The sentence ended in a shrug.

"But d'you mean he . . . ?" Arthur began.

"Not a shadow of doubt," said Mr. Scrope. "Outrunning the constable. 'Borrowing' our money and not able to pay it back. I'd had my suspicions for some years, but I had nothing to go on. They lived very simply. So far as I know, he wasn't speculating. We paid him a good salary and a liberal entertaining-allowance . . ."

"Then what was the reason?" asked Paula.

Mr. Scrope smiled sourly before answering:

"I'm afraid your sex, madam, was once again to blame. An extravagant wife. I stayed a week with them on my way south; and, though one doesn't like to spy on one's hostess, I had to remember that Morgan was an officer of the company which I have the honour to control and that, in stopping with him, it was my duty to see how he represented the company's interests. Well, I had no fault to find with his office-work. And the entertaining was admirably carried out. What made me uncomfortable was the money that little Mrs. Morgan seemed to be spending. I had reason to know that she had no private means, but she was pouring out a fortune on dresses and hats. Out of five times that the front-door bell rang, four times it was a messenger from one of the most fashionable shops. I saw these dress-boxes and band-boxes being carried in, I saw the names on them. And I knew that a crash was impending. . . . Curiously enough, I'd written to our general manager the day before the tragedy. I'd said Morgan must go. If a woman buys her frocks from Céline and her hats from Estelle, either she's so well-off that her husband has no need to toil away as our Paris manager, or else he's putting his hand in the till. And that's what Morgan was doing . . . , *had* been doing for months. He'd be alive now, we should never have caught him if I hadn't gone to stay there, but it's an old maxim of mine that when you employ married men, you must keep as close a watch on their wives as on them. . . . You're missing a very wonderful champagne, Mrs. Daventry . . ."

V

"And, if he hadn't come to stay here," said Paula on the last day of Mr. Scrope's visit, "you might have been given Paris by now. '*If a woman buys her frocks from Céline* . . .' " she quoted hysterically, " '*and her hats from Estelle* . . .' It was only one, Arthur, and Aunt Martha paid for it!"

"Hardly worth explaining that to Scrope," Arthur sighed. The nerves of both were gone; and their tempers were going. "And we couldn't be in much deeper if you'd got half a dozen. He's seen that miserable box coming up here every night and he's formed his own conclusions. There's no fault to find with my office-work. We live simply; and, so far as he knows, I don't speculate. Our weak place, though, is that we can't be trusted not to outrun the constable. . . . It's bad luck. I don't mean that I'm blaming you," he ended in a tone which conveyed, as Paula realised glumly, that he meant nothing else.

"If I felt more sure of him, I'd make a clean breast of the whole business," she ventured desperately.

"And get us labelled as secret drinkers, hypocrites, liars . . . ? My dear, it's enough that we've lost Paris; we don't want to have Scrope writing a confidential report to the general manager that I'm to be fired . . ."

He broke off as a knock fell on the door and Wilson came in to announce that Mr. Scrope's luggage had been put on his car and that he was waiting in the hall to say good-bye. Grimly determined to hide their disappointment under a smile, Arthur and Paula hurried downstairs and plunged into a fusillade of valedictory compliments. "I can't say how much I've enjoyed myself . . ." "It's been delightful to have you here . . ." "Now you're not coming to see me off, unless you *want* to go into Cannes . . ." "There's plenty of time, you know, sir . . ."

Mr. Scrope looked at his watch and made a hurried movement towards the door.

"Plenty of time for the Calais 'Blue'," he replied, "but I'm going to Paris. The Paris 'Blue' starts half-an-hour earlier. Are you *really* coming? It's this wretched Morgan business," he explained, as Arthur and Paula got into the car. "We haven't appointed his successor yet; and, though you'd think we had a dozen men for the job, it's far from easy to find all the necessary qualities in one and the same candidate. To begin with, our Paris representative must be a man of good breeding, good education, good manners. He must be a good man of business and a man of the world. Morgan would have been ideal if he hadn't been ruined by an extravagant wife . . . However, I've managed to keep off shop for the last week; and I'm not going to break down now," he informed them with tantalising finality. "We're in good time, I think. When the car has dropped me, it must take you back. And if you want to go anywhere first . . . The Galeries Fleuries are always worth a visit. I leave you to make your own arrangements."

An hour later, the Daventrys were back at Antibes. Though the sun was hot on the Croisette and the blue sky was reflected in an unruffled mirror of blue sea, Cannes—for this afternoon at least—had lost its charm; and, though they had seen the Paris "Blue" steaming out of Cannes with Mr. Scrope waving a hairy paw from his window, both Paula and Arthur felt that in some disturbing way they were not finished with him yet.

"I shouldn't be in the least surprised," said Arthur, seeking relief in defamation, "if he'd got Wilson to cash him a cheque on a bank where he had no account . . . What did I tell you?"

They were hardly inside the Villa Montcalm before their uncle's butler appeared with an air of unwonted embarrassment.

"I have the wine-book here, sir," he whispered to Arthur. "If you could spare time to run through it . . ."

His tone prompted Paula to ask if anything was amiss.

"We've been a little heavy on the gin this week, ma'am," Wilson explained. "Mr. Scrope . . . ."

"Did he take a bottle to bed with him?" Arthur inquired.

"*No*, sir! It was just the cocktails before luncheon and dinner. And what I brought up to your room, sir. And what Mr. Scrope had when he was dressing . . ."

"You mean he had a second go?" asked Paula indignantly.

Wilson sighed apologetically.

"I feel *I* am to blame, ma'am," he replied. "It was an accident, as you may say, on the first night. When I come to carry the box down from your room, I missed my footing, ma'am, and broke a glass. Mr. Scrope was very humorous, ma'am, oh, very humorous indeed. He looked at the name on the box and asked permission to see what he called your hat, ma'am. When he'd raised the lid, he sort of smiled, ma'am, and told me to bring the box along to his room if you'd finished trying on your hat. That was how he *put* it, ma'am."

"And this happened on . . . the *first* night?" Paula inquired faintly.

"The night he arrived, ma'am."

"That," said Arthur, "finishes it. My job's gone. In one, two days' time I shall get a letter . . ."

In two days' time a letter, addressed from Paris, arrived to inform his late host and hostess that Mr. Scrope had reached his destination in safety and comfort.

"*And now,*" he added, "*I am in the thick of this tragic Morgan business. Before I left, I wanted to offer a piece of advice. Mrs. Daventry will at once think that I am going to recommend her not to buy a hat at Estelle's, but she will be wrong. I should not dream of showing myself so impertinent and unappreciative. My recommendation, for what it may be worth, is that she should go on as she has begun: the woman who controls the small situations can control the big. I make her my compliments. For a moment, when I forgot that you were holiday-making, I lapsed into business and began to enumerate the qualities expected of a successful manager in an important branch. He must be, I said, a man of affairs and a man of the world; but, first and foremost, I should have added, he must be a man of resource, a man of reserve, a man who runs his own show in his own way and a man who can conceal his feelings. A diplomatist, in short. It is surprising how few people can keep their own counsel or bridle their own emotions; and yet we are all of us liable to disappointments, annoyances, suspense, uncertainty. . . .*

"*When you both come back to England, I want you to dine with me and to discuss the question of Paris. If you would care to apply for the position . . .*"

"If . . . you . . . would . . . *care* . . . ," said Paula slowly. "And you called him pre-Victorian."

"Of all the infernal old scoundrels . . . ," cried Arthur. "He's been making fools of us for a solid week. Torturing us to see how much we could stand without squealing . . ."

"In his dotage, into the bargain," Paula continued softly.

A moment of silence followed, to be broken by the ringing of a bell. Wilson went to the front door and came back with a glisteningly white oval box. On the side and top, in a dashing black, ran the words: *Estelle, Galeries Fleuries, Cannes*. On a card attached to the encircling ribbon were the words: "*With Mr. T. A. Scrope's compliments and best thanks.*"

"I don't quite know who wins over this," Paula murmured, as she began to unpack her new hat.

MICHAEL WEST

MICHAEL WEST has attempted to recapture the spirit of the Troubadour romances, and when the stories first appeared it was thought by more than one distinguished critic that they must have been copied from some mediæval source.

"Cerise," from *Clairdelune*, is reprinted by permission of Messrs. George G. Harrap and Co., Ltd.

CERISE

Petite Cerise with thy coat of green,
Thou knowest full many a tale, I ween.
Petite Cerise with thy heart of stone,
Wilt thou not tell me a single one?

"When Summer is come and the sun shines bright,
And the dew is hot in the leaves at night.
When my belly is warm and my coat is red,
Then I will tell you a story," he said;
Then Summer put on her flowery gown
And the fruit grew ripe and the boughs bent down;
And this is the story that Petite Cerise
Told to me under the cherry trees.

NOW there was once a certain knight named Sir Robert Malfortune because that he was always unlucky; for never a stone fell from a wall but he was always there to catch it on his head; and so it was always, even from squiredom till knighthood, never a happy chance fell in his way, but always unluckiness and ill fortune. And yet ever the unluckier he was, the merrier he became, and never lacked a jest at each evil case, whatsoever befell.

Yet once was he fortunate, and that was when he married the Lady Felice, who was the fairest woman that ever you saw; yet even so was he unlucky, for though they prayed and offered candles in the church and also at Rome, not a child came to bless them; and that was the more pity because that if he had no son to succeed him, then would all the land that he possessed go to his cousin, Sir Malherbe, who was a harsh man, and as wicked as the Sultan or as Satan himself. And at last Sir Robert made a vow, that if God would give him a child, he would serve His cause in Palestine so long as he might bear arms.

Therefore he embraced his wife, and put on his armour and went his way. Yet had he not been over a month on the field ere a poisoned arrow struck him in the shoulder, so that he could not wield a sword, and he was forced to return home.

And when he came home, his wife was brought to bed of a child: and the poison in his shoulder hurt him sore, so that together with the expectation of the heir to his estate, he fell into a fever, and drew very nigh to death: and when he was almost at death's door, there came a message to him saying, "Thy wife is delivered of a child." And he said, "Is it a son?" and because the messenger said nought he knew it was not a son but a girl-child; and he said, "Now am I ready to die, since it is God's will that it should be so. I have never been of good fortune, yet mayhap it will not be counted against me, for God sends our evil chances as well as our good, and it is no sin to be unfortunate."

And ere a few days passed he called his wife to him, and bade her farewell, and said, "Sweet wife, I have nought to give thee in parting, save one thing." And he told her to open the chest that stood at his feet, "and there thou wilt find a little sprig of cherry, that I gathered when I was in Palestine. For when our Christ was a-thirsty and found no figs on the barren tree, He passed on and came to a cherry tree, and because He was thirsty and the fruit was good, He blessed the tree, so that there is none like it in all the world; and that is the same tree that stood in the Blessed Mother's garden, whose boughs bent down to her of themselves, when St. Joseph was ill-humoured and would not reach up to pluck for her; and of that same tree I plucked a sprig as I rode on my way to the ship homeward."

And before many years the Lady Felice died also, and gave the sprig to her daughter, whom she named Cerise, because of it.

And Cerise planted it in the garden of the cottage where she dwelt and watered it both day and night, so that it grew into a very fair tree, and bore the biggest, reddest cherries that ever you saw.

And the Lady Cerise took a ladder and climbed up, and gathered a basket of cherries, and when it was full she came down, and set the basket by her, and fell asleep at the foot of the ladder.

And as she was asleep her cousin, that wicked Sir Malherbe, looked over the wall, and saw the cherries, how ripe and big they were, and came over the wall and took them away. So when she woke up they were all gone. "Yet," said she, "I will not grumble nor grutch, for mayhap some wayfarer passed, and was weary, and took them, and so went on his journey the merrier because of the cherries."

And Sir Malherbe took the cherries to the Duke, because he sought to win favour with him. For Sir Malherbe had a daughter named Honteuse, the sourest-tempered wench that ever threw a pan at a scullion, and he thought by winning the favour of the Duke to find her some rich suitor, yea, even the Duke himself in marriage, so that he might get more lands, and make his coffers the fuller of money.

And the Duke was very pleased because of the cherries, for never were there cherries like to them; for whoever tasted of them, never had he rest, but was always longing for more. And so it was with the Duke.

But it came to pass that the Blessed Mother saw how Sir Malherbe stole the cherries from the tree that belonged to the Lady Cerise, which her father had given her, and she set a guard of angels about it, so that when he sought to get more cherries he could not come nigh the tree.

And meanwhile the Duke languished for longing of the cherries; and ever he asked Sir Malherbe to bring him some, and ever Sir Malherbe made excuse, until he was forced at last to fly the Court altogether. And at last the Duke's longing became so great that he could scarce sleep for thinking of the cherries, so that he made a proclamation in this wise, that whatsoever lady would bring him cherries such as would satisfy his longing, he would make her his wife.

And many ladies came, each bringing the fairest cherries that ever she knew of and took them to the Court, hoping to wed the Duke and become the Lady of the Realm.

And as Cerise sat in her garden she saw the equipages passing along the road, and she asked what was all this company, and they told her it was for the wedding of the Duke.

And she was very sad, for she said, "I would fain have seen the wedding, for many fine ladies would have been there, and music, and I know not what of finery." And as she pondered there came a thought into her mind, and she said, "Maybe if I brought the Duke some of my cherries, he would suffer me to stand in the court as the procession goes by, for in truth I think they are very fine cherries; I never saw such fine cherries, though maybe that is because I know no other cherries but mine and those that stand in the Pastor's garden—and they be very small and green, for he always forgets to water them."

Therefore she filled her basket with cherries and covered it with a kerchief to keep the dust from their red coats, and set out for the palace of the Duke.

And when she came there, there was a great porter at the door who would not give her admittance. And as she spoke with him the kerchief slipped off the top of the basket and he saw the cherries, and he saw how fat and glistening they were, and he said, "Give me some of your cherries and I will let you in." And she said, "Then let it be few and those round the edge, which be meanest, for I brought them for the Duke." And he took the basket in his hand, and in a while he came back and led her in.

And the Duke had now tasted of all the cherries that were there, and none satisfied aught of his longing.

And as he was about to go away very sick at heart (because none gave ease unto his yearning) there came in the porter, and said, "Lo, here is a certain damsel that would speak with thee." And he went out and Cerise stood before the Duke. And he said, "What wouldst thou, damsel?" And she said, "Sir Duke, they told me yonder that this day thou wast to be wedded, and it came into my mind that maybe thou wouldst let me stand in the court to see thee pass by, so that I might behold the finery and the priests and the incense, and the fair ladies, for there be few that pass along the road by my cherry tree—and most of those be pilgrims. And I have brought thee a basket of cherries, if it so please thee."

And as the Duke looked on her he thought that he had never seen a fairer damsel, nor softer cheeks, nor redder lips than hers. And he said, "Show me now thy cherries, little one, for methinks no cherries could be sweeter than thy own fair lips." And she opened her basket and lo! they were all stones and stalks, for the porter had eaten them everyone. And he said, "Did I not tell thee so? Come, let me taste of thy lips, and that will be a recompense." And it was so with her lips as it had been with the cherries, that once he had tasted he could never cease longing.

And lo! as she looked down at her basket, it was full of ripe cherries again, as though they had never been touched. She said, "Behold now is a miracle, for the Blessed Mother has filled my basket again with cherries, that the porter had ate."

And the Duke said, "Then have I a double treasure, and both always, so that thou wilt be my wife and Lady of the Realm."

And so she was his wife, and lived happily, and had many children, and never a day of sorrow, until at last she went to heaven where is no weeping but always sunshine, and fair flowers, and fruit trees growing by the river, whence the angels ever bear full baskets unto the throne of God. Whither our Lord Jesus grant that we may all come at last.

And this is the story that Petite Cerise
Told to me under the cherry trees.

SHEILA KAYE-SMITH

SHEILA KAYE-SMITH (Mrs. Penrose Fry) is well known as the novelist of Sussex, in which county she lived in her girlhood. At an early age she began to write, and published her first novel, *The Tramping Methodist*, in 1908. Encouraged by the appreciation accorded to this, she has followed it with a series of works of fiction, including, among others, *Starbrace* (1909), *Sussex Gorse* (1916), *Tamarisk Town* (1919), and *The George and the Crown* (1925).

"A Day in a Woman's Life," from *Joanna Godden Married, and Other Stories* (1926), is reprinted by kind permission of the author.

A DAY IN A WOMAN'S LIFE

I

MORNING

THE first colourless light of dawn crept slowly up from the east, over the meadows of Padgeham and Dorngate. It left the Rother Marshes in shadow, touching only the tops of the hills, making them stand out as pale islands above the valleys of the little streams. It shimmered on the windows of Pipsden, that cluster of tiny cottages on the road from Hawkhurst to Rye. The cottages were beginning to wake—blinds were drawn, windows opened, columns of blue, wood-scented smoke rose out of their chimneys into the windless air. It was time for the men to go to work—on the Tong Wood estate, or on the Manor Farm—and the women were busy preparing breakfast. Only a house rather larger than the rest, standing a little way back from the road among some barns, was still asleep.

For some time Joyce Armstrong had been conscious of the disturbing light. She had thrust her face into the pillow and tried to shut it away. But she was aware of it spilling itself about the room over her shoulders, into the mirror, and she knew when the moment came when it filled itself with sunshine and she could ignore it no longer.

She sat up in bed, shaking back the long hair from her face, stretching her arms slowly. She was a beautiful woman, of slow movement and heavy though not ungraceful build—in the middle of her thirties, but bearing their trace not in any ageing of her features or her skin so much as in an indefinite weight of character expressed in her sombre eyes. The first spring sun had tanned her slightly, and her extended throat and arms showed a warm yellowish brown against her white muslin nightdress.

She yawned . . . carelessly flinging the back of one large hand to her mouth . . . then a deep shiver went through her. . . .

Time to get up. It must be quite seven o'clock, and she had a lot to do before she started. Started . . . should she go? Why, of course, she'd go. She must know for certain—understand the meaning of all this. Anything would be better than the past week with its uncertainty, its hope deferred.

There might be a letter this morning. Of course it wasn't likely that he'd write at the last minute—unless he put her off. He'd done that before—put her off at the last minute. He probably did it like that to avoid any protest or entreaty from her. Bah! His little treacheries. But after three years one couldn't help it—if only one could help going on in spite of his faults. That was what humiliated her—forgive, forgive, forgive. Angry tears flowed into her eyes, and she jumped out of bed.

She pulled up the blind, and the sunshine filled the room. A soft blue sky lay over the fields, over the woods that roughened the piling ridges of Kent. Near at hand was the smoke of the Pipsden breakfast fires, the red roofs slanting to windward, the busyness of the little backyards, the stillness of a pond. Her throat tightened, and the tears of anger became tears of blinding sorrow. Oh, those soft blue and golden days that had been in the beginning, when every day some token of his love and tenderness came up to her from the Marsh—either a letter or a little gift, or he himself in his big Sunbeam car . . . she remembered how once she had heard its throbbing in her dreams, and woken at seven to find him already there. Those were the days before he was sure of her. She turned quickly from the window, back into the sun-filled room, and shrugged on a kimono which lay over a chair, thrusting at the same time her bare feet into mules. Clap, clap went her heels on the carpet of the room, and then a louder clap on the polished boards that surrounded it. It would wake Mother if she went clapping downstairs like that—mules were no good if your heels were slim—better have got moccasins. . . . But Laurie had loved the way they used to hang from her toes when she dangled her legs . . . she must not think of Laurie—already she could feel the tears coming back. She made a vow to herself not to think of Laurie till she had made the tea.

The kitchen was dark. The blinds were down and the sun was at the other side of the house. She hoped there were no black-beetles about. Oh, what was that?—Only Perkins the cat, rubbing against her legs in an ecstasy of joy. His tail waved like a pine tree above his arched back, his hair stood out, all his body quivered with the organ-music of his song. The lovely, lovely thing. She picked him up, and buried her face in the humming softness of his flank.

"Oh, Perkins, love me—don't kick—don't go away."

But Perkins was on the floor, still vibrant, but aloof. His love was strictly practical, with a view to the morning's milk—it was not to be squandered on anything merely human. He stepped daintily beside her to the door, as she went to take in the jug. Then he led the way back to his saucer. She filled it with new milk.

"You don't deserve it, you naughty Perkins. You don't really love me—it's only cupboard love."

"Lap-lap-lap-smack," said Perkins.

"After all why should you love me more disinterestedly than—no, I haven't made the tea."

She leaped to the stove. What a nuisance it was, being unable to get a girl to sleep in the house. One had to do all the morning's work oneself. In summer it wasn't so bad, but in winter. . . . Ugh! Thank heaven, winter was over. But next winter . . . what would that be like?—Not like last winter—no, it couldn't be. It must be different. But would it be?—She mustn't think of it. "If winter comes can spring be far behind?" . . . A tear fell hissing on the stove. "Some more milk, Perkins? Don't put your head in the jug."

A loud rat-tat sounded in the front of the house. Joyce jerked herself upright, and the blood ebbed out of her cheeks. That was the post. For a moment she felt as if she could not move. Was there a letter from him lying on the doormat, where she had so often seen it—his black, vigorous handwriting distinguishing it from other letters even at a distance. But if there was, it could mean nothing good—it would be putting her off, otherwise he'd never leave her ten days without a letter and then write on the morning he was expecting to see her. It would be better if there was no letter—and yet, would it? Would the fact that he had not written tell her anything? Wouldn't it leave her more hopeless in the dark than ever? At least if he wrote, she would know definitely if he expected to see her, and if he did not, why not. Lord! What a coward she was! She had it in her power to put an end to all this questioning by going to the door. But she could not move. Rat-tat! Again! That meant the postman was waiting. She would have to go.

"Good morning—a registered parcel to be signed for?" That must be from Laurie—who else? . . . No, it was her mother's tortoiseshell spectacles, sent back from repair. . . . "Thanks. And the letters? Thanks. Good morning."

A circular, her mother's weekly letter from her aunt—that was all.

Then suddenly she knew that she had wanted desperately to hear, even if it meant the destruction of her one faint hope of seeing him. Anything was better than this uncertainty. He had not written for ten days, not since their last meeting. He had never been so long before without writing—and she had written twice, the last letter imploring him to write to her, if it was only a line. What had happened? Something must have happened to account for his silence. Had he gone away suddenly and in his hurry forgotten to post the letter that told her of it—or had he given the letter to someone else who had forgotten to post it? All the explanations which could possibly leave her a good opinion of him rushed through her mind, and she took the kettle off the stove, filled the teapot, and set the bedroom tray. By the time she was carrying the tray upstairs, others more disquieting had arrived. Perhaps he was wanting to choke her off, and had chosen this way of doing it—perhaps he had found someone else he liked. . . . Oh, no, he had been so sweet when she had seen him last and they had planned this day. . . . He could not have changed—perhaps he was ill, too ill to write—perhaps he was dead.

"Good morning, Mother dear—I hope you had a good night."

She sat down the tray by her mother's bed, and kissed her.

"Here are your spectacles come back—and Aunt Milly's letter."

"I heard you go downstairs a great while ago."

"Yes—I'm afraid my heels flopped and woke you. I must get some new slippers."

"No, no, I was awake. I've been awake since five. I wish I could get someone to help you in the mornings, dear—it's a shame for you to have to get up and make my tea."

"Oh, I don't mind a bit. I like getting up early on these fine mornings."

So they prattled to each other—about the house and the weather and the tea and the cat; and all the time Joyce was saying to her mother in her heart—"Oh, Mother, I'm in anguish because my lover doesn't write to me, because he's getting casual about me, getting tired—soon he'll want a change, and I love him as much as I ever did, though I see all his faults as I never did. Oh, Mother, help me! But you can't!"

No, her mother couldn't help her, because her mother had never known anything like this. Love had come to her, as it seemed to have come to so many of her generation, as an expanding flower instead of a devouring flame. Love for her had meant marriage, protection, children . . . why must it mean something so different to her daughter, who needed all these things as much as she?—Oh, why, why, why? . . . "If Laurie really loved me he would marry me," she said in her heart—"it is all nonsense what he says about being unable to. He has a comfortable home and lots of money to spend on things like cars and trips to London. If he really loved me, he'd let the mortgage rip, and be poor with me. He doesn't really love me. Then why do I love him? Because I can't help it, I suppose.'

As she was carrying the tray out of the door, a new thought flashed upon her—"I won't go." She suddenly made up her mind not to go to see him at Warehorne. If he was calmly expecting her to come, though he hadn't written to her since their last meeting, it would serve him right if she failed to appear, and perhaps make him appreciate her a little more. If he had been untrue to her, it would save her face—if he had merely gone away . . . it would be horrible turning up at the farm and having to ask: "Where is Mr. Holt?" and be answered: "He's not here, ma'am, he's in London." No, she had much better not to go, and for quite an hour she really thought she wouldn't.

During that hour she dressed, let in the daily girl who prepared the breakfast, helped her mother over the last stages of her toilet. Perkins came up, voluptuous with the thought of fish, rubbing against Joyce as she knelt to fasten her mother's frock, with little hoarse cries in his throat. Joyce thought: "If I don't go it will mean more uncertainty. To-day's Saturday—I can't hear from him till Monday—perhaps I shan't hear then. I can't bear this for another three days. I must go and find out what's happened, however bad it is."

"What are you doing to-day, my dear?" asked her mother, when they were at breakfast.

"I'm going over in the car to Warehorne to see the Holts—don't you remember my telling you?"

"Yes, of course I do—and Lilian Smith is coming to spend the day with me."

That was another reason why she must go—she'd asked Lilian Smith to come in and spend the day with her mother— "So good of you, Lilian dear; you know I can't leave Mother alone all day, and I simply must go to see some people at Warehorne." What a fool she'd look if she stayed at home!

"Has Mrs. Holt come back from Italy?" continued her mother.

"Yes, she came back last week"—no need to tell that Mrs. Holt had gone to stop with a sister at Brighton.

"Well, give her my very kind remembrances. Tell her I'm so sorry I'm not equal to calling upon her. Mr. Laurie Holt is at home, I suppose?"

"Yes, Mother," said Joyce, and blushed heavily. It was dreadful having to deceive Mother like this—Mother who was so understanding, and so young, in spite of her age—so much younger than her daughter.

Mrs. Armstrong saw the blush and the droop of the head.

"Well, you be wise and careful, my dear. He's paid you a great deal of attention, but young men seem to be so queer nowadays. You mustn't let him play with you."

Joyce laughed.

"Darling, I'm not what you'd exactly call in my first youth, and if I'm not able to look after myself I ought to be."

That was true, anyhow.

When breakfast was over, she went out to get her car. It was kept in one of the sheds at the back of the house—sheds which did not belong to the Armstrongs, but to the smallholder who rented the steading. The car was a small Humber; she had bought it secondhand in a fit of extravagance and daring with some money left her by an uncle. Those were the days when the big Sunbeam could no longer be depended on as in the beginning to bridge the gulf between Pipsden and Warehorne, and she had become terribly conscious of the looping miles of the marsh road. Moreover, the lesson had given her a less plaintive excuse for her demands on Laurie's time and company. She would never be a good driver—she was not capable or resourceful enough—but she had the right amount of timidity, neither so much as to make her nervous, nor so little as to make her presumptuous, and had come through her first six months without any mishap, though her speedometer recorded over a thousand miles, most of which had been run to and fro between Hawkhurst and the Marsh.

The Humber was difficult to start. She flooded the carburettor, advanced the spark, cranked furiously and in vain. This was when one wanted a man—when one saw the preposterousness of a woman living alone. Living alone . . . and she and Laurie were what she supposed was called "living together" . . . living together fifteen miles apart.

There! It had started at last. Chug-chug-chug. She brought it round to the door, and ran in to fetch her hat and driving gloves and say good-bye to her mother.

"When will you be back, dear?"

"I don't know. They may ask me to stay to tea. But you'll be all right with Lilian, won't you?"

"Oh, perfectly. Enjoy yourself, my dear. You've got a lovely day."

Suppose Laurie wasn't there—what should she do about lunch? Suppose her conjectures were right as to his being away? She couldn't come home and tell them she'd found nobody at Warehorne. She'd have to get lunch at the inn—she must take enough money with her. Lord! What a fool she was, setting out on a wild-goose chase like this.

II

NOON

SHE backed out of the gate—a process she hated—and was on the great ridge road that flows like a ribbon from Hawkhurst to Rye. Craunch!

—that was an ugly gear-change—how careless she was—craunch!—the second was just as bad. Now the little car was running smoothly, the speedometer climbing into the twenties. She leaned back, giving herself up to the soothing of speed. It soothed her thoughts into a queer rhythm—they no longer fluttered to and fro like the needle on the accumulator dial—but went resolutely and rhythmically forward like the wheels. They told her that she was a fool to make this journey, and just because she was a fool to make it, it must not be made in vain. When she came home some useful purpose must have been accomplished, she must somehow have retrieved her life out of this miserable uncertainty, either by a fresh start in happiness or by a decided end. Her journey would definitely show her what had happened and what was going to be. She dared not think of joy, so she thought of sorrow.

She was going to break off with Laurie. She could bear no more of his treatment, of his neglect, of the slow, selfish dying of his love. Better end it all, and find herself free again as she had been once. Free . . . it seemed a hundred years since she had been free, since she had woken in the morning feeling that the day belonged to her. Some words floated into her mind—"*union libre*" . . . that meant "free union"—free when you were bound in body, mind, and heart. . . . But soon she would be really free, so free that she would forget that once she had found her slavery sweet.

Free . . . She remembered some words she had read in a novel, about how at the beginning of a love affair, the man is the seeker, the maker of occasions, and how at the end it is the woman. That was true. At the beginning it had all been Laurie's pursuit, his delicious pursuit—now it was hers, her sorrowful, humiliating pursuit. Why, it was she who had fixed to-day's meeting—he would have trusted to something more fortuitous bringing them together. Why couldn't she let him go?—as he would have let her go at the beginning if she had run away faster than she had.

But now she would let him go—more, she would send him away. "Laurie, I have endured enough—I can endure no more." "Oh, Joyce," he would plead. But she would be firm—"No, I am going. You must learn that a woman can't be treated like this." Oh, she almost hoped that he would give her the opportunity—that he would not have a reasonable excuse for his conduct in . . . of course, he might. He might have gone away—he must have gone away—he couldn't have received both her last letters and not answered them. . . . Perhaps he had been away, and for some reason the letters had not been forwarded, and he had come back either last night or early this morning and had found them there, and was now waiting for her full of anxiety, full of regret and tenderness. . . . "Oh, my darling little Joyce—how dreadful for you. I'm so terribly sorry. But I was sent for suddenly up to town, and those idiots never forwarded anything. How can I make things up to you? It's difficult now, but when we are married . . ." The colour had mounted on her cheeks and her lips parted joyfully—she almost forgot it was a dream.

She came out of it the next moment, as a flock of sheep met her in Sandhurst. She stopped the car, and her thoughts seemed to stop with it. She saw only the dusty, panting sheep, and her heart was full of pity for the poor things—many of them had lambs running along beside them, bleating too, but in shriller voices. They were past now, and she set forward again, through the trim wide street of Sandhurst, quickening her pace towards Linkhill.

How well she knew the road—the sign of the running greyhound outside the inn, the throws where one road went into Sussex and the other into Kent. She had hardly ever been along that Kentish road, though she had often wanted to. She had used the car almost entirely for her visits to Warehorne. But when she was Free she would drive a lot about the country. She would take her mother out for drives—her mother had often seemed as if she wanted to come and wondered why her daughter drove off without her. She would make up to her mother for a lot of things when she was Free . . . she knew now that she would be free—that momentary softness of hope was but a dream. Laurie would have no reasonable excuse to offer, and short of a clear, convincing, reasonable excuse she would not forgive. If he had been unfaithful (she had forgiven him for that once) or remiss (she had forgiven him for that a hundred times), or had got into another of his queer, selfish muddles, her mind was made up as to what she would do. "I can bear no more. You don't really love me, or you couldn't treat me like this. No—it really is ended now."

"Let us agree to give up love
And root up the infernal grove,
Then shall we return and see
The worlds of happy Eternity——"

sang the car, as she ran across the Rother Marshes into Sussex—where the villages of Northiam and Beckley and Peasmarsh were threaded on the road like beads on a string.

Well, she had lived through three years of it, and only the first had been worth living. The others had been hell. However, they had done her this service in showing her the kind of husband he would have made—weak, selfish, unreliable—how dreadful it sounded!—but it was true. It was true, too, that she had loved him in spite of it all. He was so attractive. . . . But she was glad she had not married him . . . though she would never forget the day he had told her he could not marry her, bringing forward long strings of figures and talks of mortgages and his plans for the farm, and other things which she could not understand. What a fool she had been not to finish it all that day . . . that was when she ought to have broken with him, and spared herself all this. What had made her stick to him—love or hope? Had she hoped that her love would make him change his mind, change his fate, and marry her after all?—Hadn't she all along been hoping that he would marry her in the end?—didn't she hope it still? Oh, God!—what it is to have a patient, indestructible hope . . . and wouldn't it be degrading as well as foolish to marry him after all that had happened? . . . Hang it all, he had treated her badly from the start . . . a woman like herself, desirable, well-connected, who had been sought by others . . . to condemn her to this unutterable life, just so that he could be free and spend money and buy land . . . it was monstrous! She owed it to her dignity to end things at once.

"And throughout all eternity
I forgive you, you forgive me—
As our dear Redeemer said,
This the wine and this the bread——"

sang the car, taking her through Peasmarsh.

She would soon be in Rye. Already the fields were falling away to the southeast. She saw the blue line of the sea . . . and then the green vastness of the marsh spreading away into veiled distances. From the ridge it looked like a huge map, marked out with roads and water-courses, with dots of roofs and steeples. She saw the foot of the Isle of Oxney—she saw the abrupt hillock of Stone with its square church tower . . . when she was Free she would go to church again. . . . Now she was entering Rye, and for a few relieving moments her mind was fixed on manœuvring the car through the narrow streets. . . . Now she was out of the town, rushing along the Straight Mile—zip-zip . . . let her out . . . open the throttle wide . . . zip-zip . . . thirty coming round on the speedometer tape . . . thirty-five . . . oh, if only I can get her up to forty . . . if I can get her up to forty, Laurie will have a reasonable excuse that I can accept . . . zip-zip . . . Guldeford corner . . . I must slow down . . . and of course I won't accept any excuse. . . . I'm going to be Free.

Now she was nearing Warehorne she began to feel afraid. It would be a very terrible meeting—it would make her sick. And suppose he had taken the matter out of her hands and had decided to get rid of her—suppose she found a message from him telling her all was over . . . it would be a cruel way of doing things, but then men were often cruel when they were frightened . . . or angry . . . angry with themselves. Besides, what else could have happened?—What else could account for his silence, except a definite determination to break with her? . . . Unless he was dead. . . . Oh, God, Laurie dead!

Then a new fear attacked her. What would she say to the parlourmaid when she arrived? If he was away from home, she didn't want the girl to think that she had come to lunch. She must put on speed and arrive well before the luncheon hour—she must put on a careless and haphazard manner as if she'd called in on the chance. Yet if he was expecting her and had told the servants, it would look queer if she seemed undecided herself. . . .

Both these fears—the big that made her feel sick and the little that made her feel silly—went with her all the way to Warehorne. Her hand on the steering-wheel was clammy, her foot shook on the accelerator. What a pitiful spectacle is a woman driving a motor-car when she is in love!

By the time she had reached the house, she had made up her mind to be casual—better that the maid should think her foolish than disappointed. Agney House stood just outside the village—it was really a glorified farm, in the midst of its steading, a red, comfortable, seventeenth-century house, with staring, white-rimmed windows. It looked prosperous—exceedingly prosperous for a man who professed himself too poor to marry; but of course the prosperity was in the house only and the penury was in the land, the land which Laurie refused to give up for her sake.

She was on the doorstep—her tongue was thick and her mouth was dry. In a minute now she would know.

"Is Mr. Laurence Holt at Warehorne?"

"Yes, ma'am. But he's gone over to Brenzett on business."

"When will he be back?"

"He said about three o'clock."

"Then he's not lunching at home?"

"No, ma'am—he's lunching at Mr. Staple's."

"I see. But he'll be back at three."

"Yes, ma'am. Shall I give him any message?"

"No—that's to say—yes, tell him Miss Armstrong called, and that she'll call again later in the afternoon. Tell him it's on urgent business."

"Very well, ma'am."

The girl was a new importation—she suspected nothing. Joyce had saved her face, but nothing else.

She mechanically got into the car—as part of the programme of casualness she had left the engine running—and drove round the little sweep and out of the gate. Mechanically she turned to the right, into the village. Everything she did was mechanical. Her brain felt rigid, frozen—ossified—she could not think.

Then suddenly she began to feel, in furious throes. She felt anger, bewilderment, grief, despair—so violently that she had to bring the car to a standstill. She was trembling all over. This was worse than anything she had expected. Laurie was at home, but had gone out to lunch with someone else on the day he had invited her to come to him. He could not have forgotten their arrangement—no, that was impossible—he must have meant to slight her, to show her in this incredibly male, clumsy way that all was over between them. What should she do?—for nothing was certain. How should she act? For the first time she knew the meaning of the expression "at your wit's end."

Should she go home?—No, that was impossible. What explanation could she make to her mother or Lilian Smith? Besides, she would be condemning herself to long days of uncertainty. She could not endure that. Should she drive to Mr. Staple's and demand to see Laurie?—In her desperation she felt inclined to do that. She had a right to make a fuss, to make things hot for him—he mustn't expect her always to take everything lying down. But something at the bottom of her heart restrained her from exposing herself—better far wait till he came home, and see him there. She could manage to fill in the time somehow till three o'clock.

What should she do? Lunch was out of the question—she could not eat. Neither could she sit still. A terrible restlessness was in all her limbs—her anxiety translated into terms of motion. She would drive out somewhere in the car—drive really far and really fast—fill up all the hours with speed.

There was a wide space to turn in outside the church, and she swung round, the nose of her car pointing towards the sea. A long, white, flat road ran out into flat distances. It was the road to New Romney, so she was told by the signpost, and she set out along it, with the throttle well open. Oh, she was thankful she had got the car, that she could fill her waiting-time with fierce activity and the lull of motion, and yet was not required to support herself on legs that were weak and shaking. Her speedometer showed her that she had already come twenty-five miles, and there would of course be the twenty-five miles home. By driving out seawards she would probably add thirty miles to her day's tally, and fifty was quite enough for her unaccustomed driving. But she did not care. She must go—she could not live through time without the help of space.

She had never been out on the seaward side of the marsh, knowing only the road between Rye and Warehorne. Soon a toll-gate pulled her up.

"Sixpence . . . thank you" . . . craunch! Another noisy change—and how her leg was shaking as she put out the clutch!

"How many miles to New Romney?
Scarcely more than ten.
Shall I get there by three o'clock?
Yes, and back again."

She mustn't be later than three, or he might have gone out again. She had better be there at a quarter to three. She could contrive to sit still for a quarter of an hour.

The marsh felt very huge lying there all round her, misty, flat, and green. It was foreign—unlike the country round Hawkhurst, which was all little hills covered with spinneys and fields, and farms with fairy names. Here the farms were set far apart among sheep-dotted miles of pasture—their roofs were immensely steep and high, and yellowed over with sea-lichen, and their ricks were thatched with osiers. She passed an enormous church standing between two farms—a few miles farther on she passed another, standing among some tiny cottages which could easily have been packed into its aisles. She thought of Brookland church, and the colour left her face.

It was in Brookland tower, all among the salt-riddled oak beams, that he had first told her that he loved her, holding her to him in the darkness. She had not been surprised—for several days she had been expecting, hoping he would speak, and now at last he had spoken . . . at least, he had not spoken—his lips had given her kisses instead of words. But she had understood—or rather she had not understood. She had thought he wanted to marry her—it was not till quite a week later that she discovered he did not.

"O stop your ringing and let me be—
Let be, O Brooklands bells—
You'll ring Old Goodman out of the sea
Before I wed one else.

"Old Goodman's farm is rank sea sand
And was this thousand year.
But it shall turn to rich plough land
Before I change my dear."

That was the way her little car, rushing and humming along, always set her thoughts to music. But this was a silly song—because she was going to change her dear that very evening. She had made up her mind. Weakness hitherto had been her fault, but now she would be firm. She could bear no more. How many times had she told herself that since the beginning? The first year had been beautiful, full of happiness, in spite of some twinges of conscience and the stinging of the lies she had to tell. By the second year he had grown casual and remiss, but she had borne with him, knowing that it was his nature, and having always understood that men don't bother about little things the way women do. In the third year he had been unfaithful to her, but she had forgiven him, because she had always understood that men were liable to these attacks. Besides, she could not do without him. . . . What had happened that she could do without him now? A lot had happened—her heart was dead. He had slowly killed her heart. She did not love him any more. No, she didn't. She didn't, she didn't, she didn't!

The flat horizon was growing rough. A great shaggy wood spread across it, out of which a tower rose. Here was New Romney and the marsh's edge. Should she turn before going into the town? What time was it?—Nearly two. She had better turn. It would be too dreadful if she were late and missed him—she would turn at the next cross roads.

A signpost said: To New Romney: To Ivy-church: To Lydd. She stopped the car and backed up the Lydd road. She did it clumsily and blocked the way. A little boy on a bicycle squeezed past. He turned round and smiled at her—not mockingly, but encouragingly and kindly. The smile at once comforted and melted her—she felt grateful for this unknown being's token of good will.

III

EVENING

Back again . . . back over the same road she had come. The bonnet of her car running before her was like the nose of a living thing—the cap of the radiator was like a funny little inquiring snout. If only her car was alive and loved her, how happy she would be! She was a big fool. . . . But, oh! she did want a little love—a little affectionate, tender love—love that never demanded anything. . . . She did not think she had ever had it. Of course there was her mother . . . but so many lies stood between her and her mother. She would love her mother when she was Free. Well, to-day wouldn't be wasted now, for all its anguish—at the end of it she would be Free. No longer would she have to tell lies, no longer would she have to wrestle with circumstances, no longer would she have to run after Laurie, either drawn by his whims or driven by her longings. Free . . . Free . . . he had set her Free at last—kicked her out, put her on the pavement—but she was Free. "There's no good, Laurie—it really is done—finished this time. You don't love me. You wouldn't treat me like this if you did. . . ."

Ah, here was the toll gate. How much quicker she seemed to have come back. Another sixpence . . . the girl said: "If I'd seen who it was, I'd have let you through. We're not supposed to, but——" Another kind creature. Joyce wanted to thank her, but instead she said in her heart to Laurie: "No, this time I really will not pass it over. It's nothing to me if you care for this woman or not. You can take her, or nobody, you're not going to have me. Of course I will always be your friend."—No—she was done with him—for good—till she was fifty at any rate . . . then perhaps. . . . Not, even then. . . .

Lord! There he was on the road in front of her. She recognised his familiar step, his familiar grey suit, the way he flourished his stick instead of walking with it like other men. He must have left Mr. Staple's earlier than he had intended. What should she do? Pass him carelessly by? . . . That might hurt. . . . No, she must speak to him, otherwise the break would not be definite. She would leave no raw edges. She would cut—clean.

She sounded her horn as she drew even with him, ran on a few yards ahead, and then stopped. Without getting out of the car she turned and faced him—she saw the recognition dawn in his eyes, without reproach or fear.

"Dearest child . . ."

He came up to her, and was in the car beside her before she could speak.

"Laurie . . ." she said faintly.

"Start away, dear, and drive me home. You'll come in for a few minutes, won't you?"

"Laurie,—didn't you know I was coming to-day? Weren't you expecting me?—You asked me to lunch."

She saw his face grow blank—his brown, speckled eyes looked vacantly into hers. It was only for a second, but in that second such an agony of realisation rushed over her as almost to deprive her of consciousness. She knew that he had forgotten. All her wild conjectures of unfaithfulness, urgent business, or determined slight were beside the mark. He had made no effort to shake her off, to break bad news, his absence had been no part of a plan either cruel or compassionate. He had simply forgotten all about her.

"My dear," he was saying—"how absolutely dreadful! How perfectly awful of me! But surely we didn't fix anything definite. I said I'd let you know."

"No, you didn't"—she spoke gruffly—"it was fixed. Don't you remember? You said your people would be away, and we'd have a whole lovely day together. We'd go over to St. Mary's . . ." Her voice broke.

"Yes—of course." . . . He was beginning to be embarrassed. "Mind the gatepost"—she nearly struck it as she swung the car into the sweep. . . . "I'm awfully sorry, Joyce, you came all this way and found me out. You make me feel dreadful."

He got out and opened the door for her. She followed him into the familiar room, half office, half study—she sank down in an armchair and burst into tears.

"Joyce—darling—don't! Don't be so upset about it—it's only a little thing."

"A little thing! . . . Oh! . . . and I've been thinking all sorts of things about you—that you'd thrown me over—that you were dead even—but this is worse than anything I'd imagined."

"Worse!—My dear girl, don't be hysterical."

He came over to her and tried to pull her hands down from her eyes.

"Don't—you don't love me, or you couldn't have forgotten me. And you haven't written, either—not for ten days."

"I'd nothing to write about . . . and I was waiting till I was sure about to-day." . . . He was tying two lies together.

"Laurie, don't tell me you'd have forgotten about me, if you loved me as much as you used to."

"But I do love you just as much." Again he tried to pull away her hands.

"You don't."

"I do."

"You don't." This wasn't what she had meant to say, how she had intended the interview to go off. He slipped his arm round her, and in spite of her resistance, drew her head to his shoulder as he knelt beside her.

"Oh, Joyce darling, don't be angry. Don't let us quarrel over this. Surely we know each other well enough not to be upset by an accident."

"An accident! Oh, Laurie, if you knew what I've suffered—what I've thought. . . ."

"But it's all over now—oh, do be generous and forgive me."

"But it will happen again—something like it . . . Laurie, I can't bear any more . . . and I mean, what am I bearing it for?—where is all this leading us?"

"What do you mean, dear?"

"I mean—are—are we just going on like this until one of us marries someone else?"

"My dear child, I've told you that I can't marry you. Don't let us go over that all again."

"But I don't understand . . ."

He had risen and was walking about the room.

"Dearest, can't you let that alone? Can't we love each other as we used to do, without worrying about what may happen years ahead?"

"But we don't love each other as we used to do. Oh, Laurie, I won't say you love me less, but you love me differently. You forget me. I could bear it if I thought it was . . . I mean if we were going to be . . . but I have to bear it in vain."

"In vain? So this is 'in vain,' Joyce—all our love, all our friendship, all the heavenly moments we've had together?—It's all in vain, if you haven't something material to look forward to? Is that what you mean?"

"Oh, no, no!"

"Then what in God's name do you mean?"

She wished she knew. She wished she had said the things she had meant to say—done what she had meant to do. His sin against her was even worse than she had imagined, and yet . . . Free . . . the things she had meant to do when she was Free . . . But she would be Free—even the sight of him there before her in all his alert and lovely strength should not cheat her of her freedom. She sprang to her feet.

"Laurie . . . I'm not going on with it—I can't. . . . I can't bear . . . I'm going to be Free."

His arms were round her—her words were choked out against his breast . . . the smell of his tweed coat seemed to stifle her. She felt his warmth and strength, his arm upholding her. His lips were warm against her ear, murmuring tenderly and reproachfully—"Oh, you silly little thing—you don't know what you're saying. You're going to forgive me, and love me more than ever. Of course you are. You're upset with the heat."

Then her spirit fainted. She did not know whether she despaired more of him or of herself. He tilted back her unresisting head, and his lips came down upon hers, the seal of her bondage.

" 'Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him—till seven times?'

" 'Not until seven times; but until seventy times seven' " . . . unto the bitter end. . . .

Tired . . . tired . . . That was the only refrain her car had for her on the journey home . . . no more furious thinking . . . no more furious rhymes . . . only tired . . . tired . . . exhausted, eighty-seven miles on the speedometer. . . . Tired . . . tired. . . .

Home at last.

"Well, dear, have you had a nice day?"

"Yes, Mother, thank you—a lovely day."

IANTHE JERROLD

IANTHE JERROLD (Mrs. Menges) is the daughter of the distinguished author, Walter Jerrold, and the great-granddaughter of Douglas Jerrold. She began to write at an early age, and among her novels are *Young Richard Mash*, *Uncle Sabini*, *Hangingstone Farm*, and *The Studio Crime.*

"The Orchestra of Death" is reprinted here by kind permission of the author.

THE ORCHESTRA OF DEATH

IT was an evening in the end of November and the roadway gleamed in the lamplight under a soft drizzle of rain. A long queue waited at the gallery entrance of the Coliseum, for it was ten minutes before the opening of the doors. By the shining kerb a bent-backed man moved up and down, playing a monotonous melody on a tin whistle, his cap pulled down over his eyes and the collar of his faded coat turned up against the rain. Nobody heeded him.

A small party of young girls wearing munition badges stood in the queue near to the doorway, and there was much laughing and lively talk among them. One of them took a postcard from her handbag and passed it to the friend at her side.

"Mademoiselle José Dessars in *La Rose de la Syrie,*" she read slowly, as two others peered over her shoulder.

"Yes, that's her; not in this dance, but in the one mother seen her in at the Pavilion. She dances a treat, mother says. . . . No, a kind of dark rose shade and silver shoulder-straps. She was supposed to be a rose in the dance, see. She comes on to-night after Lucy Glynn. Got a penny, Maude?" The whistle-player stood by the kerb diffidently holding out his tattered cap.

A long line of motor-cars stood now before the open doors, and the bright vestibule was full of moving people. A poster on a wooden frame which leaned against the doorway drew the eyes of every passer-by. It was a black sheet of paper lettered in white, and bore the words:

JOSE DESSARS,
Valse Triste.

The doors opened.

"Two by two, please," said the policeman. Slowly the long queue began to move in at the narrow entrance. . . .

Josephine Dessars lay on the bed in her big, untidy room and stared with blank eyes at the shaded lamp on her open desk. She was half-dressed, and the quilt which had covered her had been tossed aside and lay in a heap on the floor. A variety of soft garments hung over the high foot of the bedstead. She held a folded newspaper in her outflung hand.

Her short coarse hair was black against the white pillow, and accentuated the pallor of her small face; her round, dark eyes were purple-ringed, and the upper lids were swollen and reddened. There was on her face no sign of tears, but the look of one who has spent many restless nights and days in an absorbing anxiety of mind.

There was a sharp click, and then the sound of a door being cautiously opened. A tall girl, with a thick knot of dull fair hair, came quietly into the room and shut the door softly behind her. She tiptoed to the side of the bed. Josephine looked up and smiled.

"Oh, you're awake! How's the headache?"

"All right now," said Josephine, and yawned, lifting her small arms above her head. "What's the time, Phyllis, dear?"

"You don't *look* much better," said Phyllis, gravely. "And it's a quarter to seven. I was just going to wake you up. And I've turned your bath on."

"Thank you, Phyllikins." Josephine yawned again and sat up. In spite of her thirty-six years she looked a child as she swung her legs over the side of the high bedstead. She was an unusually small woman, with slender limbs and a narrow, oval face. Her thick hair showed very few lines of grey.

Phyllis, her pupil and protégée, picked up the *Telegraph* from the floor.

"Why, you haven't even unfolded the paper yet—you don't seem to take any interest in anything now. What's the matter with you, José? And you've been looking simply awfully ill the last few days!"

Josephine, thrusting her feet into brocaded slippers, laughed.

"I'm all right, silly child. It's my cold still hanging on, that's all."

"I don't believe you sleep a bit at night, either," said Phyllis, settling herself down on the bed with the air of one determined to argue the matter out. "And you talk in your sleep. Last night I was awake and I could hear you. And what do you think you said? You kept muttering over and over again: 'They're dead; they're all dead.' You kept saying that. It sounded dreadful. Who's dead, Josephine, darling?"

Josephine Dessars laughed nervously.

"Did I say that, dear? How funny! The *Valse Triste* must be getting on my nerves. But I must hurry up." She flung a dressing-gown around her shoulders and went to the door. "Sort some clothes out for me while I have a bath, there's an angel."

Phyllis sighed, and got up slowly from the bed. To Josephine Dessars, as she went down the brightly lit passage, the very click of her own heels on the parquet seemed to repeat the words: "They're dead; they're all dead."

Josephine Dessars had danced for nearly thirty years. The daughter of a French circus-rider and a wandering Englishman, she had spent her childhood passing from town to town with her mother's troupe. An elfish and precocious little girl of eight, she had taken her childish part in the acrobatic displays which were a feature of such travelling shows. Later, when she had grown to a graceful girl, she joined a different company and gained a certain reputation in provincial French towns as a ballet-dancer. She had inherited the volatile and adventurous temperament of her father, together with something of the shrewdness of the French *bourgeoisie*.

So she danced her way from town to town. She had many lovers, for men and women alike fell under the spell of her happy kindness and her soft, slow voice. But she was unemotional and ambitious, and she formed no deep attachments.

She was very happy in those early days.

It was in Vienna, when she was twenty-three, that she committed the one great indiscretion of her life. There she met Otto Geracht. He was an Austrian revolutionary, a dreamer, a fanatic, almost a madman; but he had a great eloquence and a queer attractive personality. Through his influence Josephine Dessars became acquainted with a society of revolutionaries known as "The Seven." In a moment of impulse and enthusiasm she joined it. It was a small society and consisted of but seven members. They were all possessed of powerful intellects and a really great enthusiasm, but all had the same curious twist—a disregard of logic, a love of theatrical poses, a contempt of individual suffering together with a real concern for the suffering of humanity. It was their optimism and youthful faith that attracted Josephine.

Their aim was an advanced Socialism; they talked a lot of the brotherhood of man. They had indeed a beautiful faith in a future Golden Age, but, like all fanatics, they were absolutely callous to the suffering they caused, with a firm belief in an ultimate end that should justify any means.

Josephine had looked upon the whole affair as an adventure. Although these people attracted her she was not of them. She did not at first realize that what was a passing enthusiasm, a mere thrilling experience, to her, was to them the whole aim of their existence.

So she listened to the passionate eloquence of Otto Geracht and joined "The Seven." She never forgot the night of her initiation. The members met at the dwelling-place of Geracht, a big, ugly house in a narrow back street. Ten o'clock was the hour for their meeting, and Josephine had gone to it straight from the theatre; she had hurried through the gaily lit streets with an enjoyable sense of romantic adventure.

It was not until she had entered the bare gas-lit meeting-room that the first apprehension came upon her. She realised for the first time the immense earnestness of Geracht and his associates. She saw herself as she was, practical, happy, ambitious, and knew most certainly that she had nothing in common with these absorbed unworldly dreamers. She had felt suddenly hysterical and had become conscious of a desire to leave the house before she committed herself too far. But Otto Geracht had come to her and talked to her while they waited for the arrival of two late members, and the old feeling of adventure had in part returned to her. So she had remained, and when all the members had come they had seated themselves around a small square table, and she had been given a chair at the right hand of Otto Geracht.

As Josephine Dessars drove through the rainy streets of London to the Coliseum she lived again through that night of thirteen years ago. She seemed to see again the massive figure of old Geracht as he stood with square finger-ends upon the table addressing those few people in that great half-furnished room. She felt again, as she had felt so many times during the last five days, the old sensation of growing anxiety and repentance. She heard again Geracht's deep, rather harsh, voice as he formally introduced her. She remembered how the others had drunk to her health in some pale, sickly wine, and how Anna Petro, a Czech singer and the only other woman present, had looked at her across the table with a sort of contempt and pity in her melancholy eyes.

She had stood up as if in a dream and had repeated after Otto Geracht a pledge of lifelong loyalty to the brotherhood. Then Geracht had opened an old brown-covered book and had read aloud the rules of the society, which were few. He had paused and had looked around the table slowly from one tense face to another; finally his large light eyes had rested upon those of Josephine.

"And it is required of each member when elected to take a pledge of loyalty to this society. It is forbidden for any member to divulge to the outside world the names of any of his fellow-members, and it is forbidden for any member to divulge any of the secret affairs of this society. The punishment for any infringement of this rule is death."

Here he had paused, and Josephine remembered how she had watched, as if hypnotised, his big black-nailed fingers playing with the leaves of the book.

"Any member," he had repeated slowly, "who proves guilty of disloyalty will be discovered and put to death, no matter where he may be. He may hide himself in the remotest parts of earth, but sooner or later he will be found. He will receive a sign of his approaching death in the form of a black cross. In less than twenty-four hours from that time he will die."

"He will receive a sign of his approaching death in the form of a black cross. In less than twenty-four hours from that time he will die." The words echoed through the mind of Josephine Dessars as clearly as if they had but just been spoken. Then she found herself repeating, like one who strives to comfort with a parrot-phrase of consolation: "But they're dead; they're all dead."

Sitting there in the darkness she began silently to tell over the names of those who had belonged to the Secret Society of Seven.

"—Otto Geracht, died three years ago in Leipzig; Diedrich Kummer, killed in the Prague riots; Anna Petro, killed herself in Vienna the year after I came to England. They're dead, all of them. I have nothing to fear, nothing. They're all dead."

But her restless mind reverted once again to that far-off night in Vienna, and she seemed to see again the large eyes of Otto Geracht looking into her own with their vague peculiar gaze. For nearly a week she had seen those eyes, all through the days and in her dreams at night.

"You have been false," they seemed to say to her. "False! you have been false."

Josephine Dessars had been false. It was now three days since the sensational arrest of Sir Marcus Pinder, M.P.; he was yet awaiting his trial on a charge of high treason. And it was Josephine Dessars who had given the information which had led to his arrest. She had known of him in Vienna as a friend of Otto Geracht; she had indeed once met him at Geracht's house. She knew that he was pledged to the wild idealistic Socialism of the Society of Seven; he had not been a member, but she had heard him often discussed as one of the chief secret tools of the society. She knew that Geracht had had a very great influence over him and had indeed granted him sums of money with which to carry forward the cause. It was he who had arranged, under the directions of Geracht, the assassination of Mousset in 1906. All this she had known of Marcus Pinder, but during the peaceful, happy years which had elapsed after she came to England, she had heard little of him. She had still felt a certain sympathy for his ideals, although her old enthusiasm had long since died.

But when war broke out the old shadowy dreams of a brotherhood that admitted no nationality faded away. Josephine Dessars knew herself a Frenchwoman, an Englishwoman.

Then one day she had seen in the newspaper the announcement of Sir Marcus Pinder's appointment to a seat on the Treasury Bench. The name had leapt at her eyes from the white page as she had unfolded the paper. Sir Marcus Pinder! A host of recollections had come crowding into her mind. She had stood as one in a trance for a time while her thoughts had gone wandering back to the days when that name had been so familiar to her. Sir Marcus Pinder! Had not his mother been some relation of Diedrich Kummer? Her mind went back to an evening in the house of Otto Geracht. Pinder had been there. He had monopolised the talk at the supper-table. She remembered him as a short, thick-set man with greying hair and a bird-like vivaciousness of manner. Some of his words came back to her:

"The seed we sow will not bear for many years in England or in France, Miss Dessars. In Germany, and in Germany alone of all the great nations, may we hope for quick and good results. The German mind has a broadness, an idealism——"

This man was helping to control the destinies of France and England. Josephine had consulted no one. She was accustomed to bringing her mind to quick decisions. She had written that morning to the Home Office, stating clearly all that she knew of Marcus Pinder; she had explained the way in which she had acquired her knowledge, and had given a detailed account of the Society of Seven. As she wrote she felt like one confessing his old childish follies. It was as she had written her signature to the letter that she had felt a curious sudden sensation of being watched. She had looked up. There had been no one in the room. But at that moment there had flashed back to her memory for the first time for many years the picture of a big, bare room and a tall man who held a book in his large white hands.

"And it is required of each member to take a pledge of loyalty to this society. It is forbidden to divulge any of the secret affairs of this society. The punishment for an infringement of this rule is death. . . . He will receive a sign of his approaching death in the form of a black cross. In less than twenty-four hours from that time he will die."

Josephine Dessars had addressed and posted her letter of information; but from that moment she had existed in a very inferno of restlessness and excitement. All through that night she had not slept, but had lain on her back with wide eyes looking into the darkness, unable to free herself of a terror that she knew was without foundation. So it had been for every night since that one. Memories of her past life possessed her mind utterly; not by any effort of will could she rid herself of them. Neither work nor amusement could divert her thoughts for one moment. She was like one under an obsession; she felt herself dwelling upon the borderland between reason and insanity.

Looking out at the wet dim-lit streets, she found herself wondering how long this obsession would last. She had a sudden impulse to speak, to put into words her vague alarms. She turned and slid her arm around the thin body of the girl at her side.

"Phyllis—Phyllis——"

Phyllis turned to her. But under those clear, thoughtful eyes Josephine fell silent. How could she tell this girl of her shadowy fears? What had Phyllis in common with those old days of intrigue and adventure? Josephine would not alarm and mystify the child with the tale of her own neurotic foolishness.

So she said:

"It's nothing, dear. What are you thinking about that you are so quiet?"

"I was thinking about to-night. Oh, Josephine, I do hope the people will like it—I love first nights."

The car slowed down and came to a standstill. They stepped out into the fine misty rain. The street was almost deserted.

"Oh, I'm excited!" cried Phyllis, as they went up the long passage to Josephine's dressing-room. The bright-lit room was dazzling after the darkness of the street. Josephine took off her cloak and hung it over a chair. She went across the room to switch up the light over the mirrors.

"A—ah!" she cried, with a quick intake of breath. She stood rigid by the table, one hand outstretched towards the electric buttons. Phyllis saw her face go grey as paper. Her eyes dilated, and stared with an intensity of horror at something upon the laden dressing-table.

"What is it? What is it?" cried Phyllis, putting her arms around her. She was rigid to the touch as a dead thing.

Then suddenly her body relaxed; she groped for a chair and sank down upon it. She still looked with a kind of horrified bewilderment towards the dressing-table. The frightened girl followed the direction of her eyes. Two black sticks of grease-paint were upon the corner of the table; by some chance they lay one upon the other, in the form of a cross.

"Oh, what is it?" cried Phyllis again.

Josephine said:

"Nothing." She began to laugh, and tears came very quickly to her eyes. Her mind seemed filled with a terrible chaos of speculations; she could not force herself to think clearly. Like one who hears voices in his half-sleep, she listened to the terrified questions and endearments of the girl who knelt at her side. Somewhere at the back of her brain a hammer kept time to the throbbing of her heart. "I shall go mad," said its every dull thud. "I shall go mad, I shall go mad."

Phyllis cried again, her face as white as Josephine's own:

"Oh, José, what is it, what is it?"

"I saw—I thought I saw— Oh, it's nothing, Phyllis, nothing. I must dress." Josephine rose to her feet. She put her hand under Phyllis's chin with an attempt to smile; but her eyes had not lost their look of dazed horror.

"It's nothing, really. I'm awfully silly and nervy, I know, Phyl. I shall take a long rest when the season's over. We'll go away somewhere."

"But——"

"It was nothing, really. Don't think about it any more, Phylly. Help me with my dressing, dear; I think we're a bit late. This will be the first time I've made myself up as an invalid."

She went on talking vivaciously as she took off her clothes; it was less to reassure Phyllis than to stem the current of her own wild thoughts. But all the while she chattered there floated at the back of her brain a dark image, an ominous black cross.

Phyllis responded soon to her talkativeness and laughed as she stroked the folds of the garment that Josephine was to wear. It lay upon the sofa, a soft white robe of thick silk. The dance had been arranged by Josephine herself, and was set to the eerie music of the *Valse Triste* of Sibelius. It was to be a strange performance, and Josephine held secret doubts as to its good reception. The dance was an adaptation of the story to which the *Valse Triste* was written—of a dying woman, who rises from her bed and joins in the wild dance of the spirits that throng her room.

Josephine sang softly the slow opening bars of the music as she slipped her dress over her head. Phyllis watched her from the sofa, admiring the faint flush that excitement brought to her white cheeks.

"You'd better run along now," said Josephine. "I'm ready."

Phyllis turned her from the mirror and surveyed her. Her plain white dress hung in heavy folds to her ankles. It was suggestive of a bedgown. The long hanging sleeves almost reached its hem. She wore no wig, and her thick dark hair stood out around her face; it was without band or ornament.

"Kiss me for luck, Phyl," she said, "and run along to the Stracheys." She turned to her mirror again as Phyllis closed the door behind her.

The safety curtain was being lowered for the interval as Phyllis entered the box where her friends were. The orchestra was playing a selection of popular airs; a buzz of talk had arisen among the audience. Phyllis looked around the auditorium before she sat down. The place was crowded.

As the curtain began slowly to go up there was a sudden hush; the first slow notes dropped on the heavy air like pearls. Phyllis leaned forward and settled her elbows on the edge of the box.

The curtain rose upon a dimly lit stage. The walls were hung with deep purple curtains; the floor was covered in dark felt. In the centre of the stage, at the back, was a high couch draped with purple cloth. A woman clothed in white lay upon it. A small lamp burnt dimly by the bedside. There was not light enough upon the stage to distinguish any details; the purple background seemed full of deep shadows. The soft, slow music from the orchestra was as quiet as sleep.

For a minute or more there was no movement, neither on the stage nor among the audience. Then Josephine stirred upon her couch and moaned softly. The valse rhythm of the sleepy music became more insistent. Josephine turned and let one arm fall listlessly over the side of the bed.

Suddenly a white flickering light appeared upon the purple background and went out. Another appeared, and another, until the dark walls seemed alive with pale dancing flames. It was as if the dim stage were full of will-o'-the-wisps. The music grew louder and lost its dreamy quality. Josephine sighed deeply like one who wakes from an unquiet sleep, and raised herself slowly upon one elbow. The stage became dim again and all the little moving lights went out. Then suddenly one appeared, a patch of wavering flame, upon the hangings of the bed. Josephine put out her hand as if to touch it; it flickered away across the floor and up the wall. Josephine gave a soft hollow laugh and rose slowly from where she lay. She stood unsteadily for one moment; she was like a spirit in her long white robe. Her face was pale, and her bare feet were white as chalk against the purple carpet. Her eyes followed the movements of the dancing flame. She made one or two uncertain steps as if to reach it; then with a low laugh she sprang after it and the strange dance began.

Soon other faint wavering flames appeared upon the walls and floor, until the whole stage was once again flickering with pale lights. They flashed across the white, smiling face of Josephine as she swayed in her fantastic dance. They seemed to dance with her like living things. The dance grew always faster as it proceeded, until the stage was dazzling to the audience. The dancer's shining draperies seemed made of the same stuff as the white flames that leapt around them. It was an eerie performance; but it was beautiful.

Josephine felt nothing now but a great exultation. For her the facts of life had ceased to exist. She was a dancer, and nothing else; she was one with the lights that danced about her head and hands, and with the bright quick sounds that danced and died like invisible butterflies. For the first time for many tortured days she found forgetfulness. The smile that was on her lips was not acted, but was the unconscious expression of sheer happiness and triumph.

Wilder and louder grew the music, and the ghostly dance swifter and swifter: until the dancer suddenly stood still and put her hand to her eyes. Then as if exhausted she sank upon the couch. The moving flames went out; the stage was dim and shadowy again. The slow theme returned and the music from the orchestra was like soft calling voices.

All was still for a few moments. Then, as before, the music quickened and grew loud. The flickering lights appeared again singly. The dancer lifted her arms, and sprang to her feet like one who makes an effort. The wild dance began again. But now the small flames, as they appeared one after another, seemed to merge together until a pale light flooded the stage. It was a queer soft radiance, neither brilliant nor harsh; it was as if the stage were full of moonshine. In this still light Josephine danced, and her white dress gleamed like a lily under the moon. She felt etherealised, a spirit dancing on an immaterial plane. Her body moved in such perfect time with her mind that she seemed to have no body. Looking straight before her she saw, but without any recognition, the black and white blur that was her audience. A movement somewhere between herself and the blur caught her eyes, and all unconsciously she lowered her gaze to it. It was the baton of the conductor moving in agitated rhythm with the music. It brought her mind back to a certain extent from its uplifted state. She felt vaguely irritated by the sight of it; the cold commonplaces of life seemed to start knocking again at the doors of her mind.

The movements of her wild dance took her to the back of the stage, but when she came to the front again her eyes were caught once more by that small object; it seemed to move with a kind of crazy desperation. Her eyes travelled up the black sleeve of the man who held it.

Then the walls of the universe seemed to fall crashing about her ears. For a moment her mind was absolutely empty; then all that she had ever known of fear and evil rushed into it like a tidal river. For she had looked into the light eyes of Otto Geracht.

There he stood, massive and tall as she had always remembered him, his great shoulders rather hunched about his ears, his grey hair hanging in wisps over his forehead. Josephine went on dancing; her limbs moved mechanically. But her mind was filled with a terror more appalling than anything she had ever known.

Round the stage she went in her swift dance, but those clear eyes, she knew, never left her for one moment. She looked into them. There was no hostility in them: large and pale, they met her own with that faint vague questioning look she remembered so well. She could see every detail of his head and shoulders; there was no light shining upon him, but he stood out with clear distinctness. Swifter and swifter moved his arms, and his great body moved with them; but his head was never turned to one side, and neither were his unblinking eyes.

Josephine forced herself to look away from him. She looked around the orchestra in the wild hope of meeting a friendly recognising glance that might dispel the terrible illusion. She could not see all the members of the orchestra, but a few of them seemed to stand out with a curious distinctness, as if she were looking at them in the light of day.

There was something familiar about the downbent head of the first violin, who stood next to the conductor. He raised his eyes from the printed sheet before him, and a cold hand seemed to close around Josephine's heart. It was Diedrich Kummer. He looked at her unseeingly.

In wild horror her eyes went from one figure to another. There were the others: Hugo Spizke and Charles Palacky stood at the right hand of Otto Geracht. They had fiddles; little Palacky was playing with that air of desperate concentrated alacrity which had distinguished all his movements. There to his right sat old Van der Heyder; he held the oboe in his hand and looked at Josephine with gentle dreaminess. Even as her terrified eyes swept his face he raised his plump hand and settled his pince-nez more firmly on his nose; it was an old mannerism of his.

There was the thin, sad Ledstein with the flute, and there Anna Petro sat by the harp. Her dark eyes held those of Josephine for a moment; there was no enmity in them, but the old enigmatical look of mockery and pity. Josephine in her wild fear had an impulse to cry out to her and implore her sympathy and support. In the old days she had been attracted by the woman's mournful beauty, and had been baffled by the atmosphere of mystery that had always surrounded her. Surely Anna Petro was capable of understanding and sympathy! But the dark eyes never changed in their regard, and the long fingers went on touching the strings with lazy indifference.

Josephine's eyes fell again upon Otto Geracht. She felt trapped and helpless. She wanted to stop the dance, to cry out, to leave the stage, but her body seemed hypnotised. Her lips were stiffened in a frozen smile. Her limbs moved without her volition; she had as little command over her movements as if she had been a wooden marionette, and the large hand of Otto Geracht had held the strings instead of the conductor's baton. Faster and faster moved that small gleaming stick, and wilder and louder grew the ghostly music.

In a very agony of terror Josephine looked up to the right in the hope of meeting Phyllis's sane and loving eyes, but she could see nothing. A black mist seemed to hang between her eyes and the auditorium. She tried to scream, but no sound left her lips.

The wild music reached its climax. This was the end, then, at last. Only those grotesquely moving figures in the orchestra were distinct. The light upon the stage went out as Josephine threw herself once again upon the dark couch. The music ended with a few slow bars. The curtain fell.

There was absolute stillness in the theatre for a few seconds. Then the applause burst out. As one man the audience rose to their feet. Volley of clapping followed volley. Some one at the back began to cry "Encore! Encore!" and the whole audience took up the cry.

Behind the curtain on the now brilliantly lit stage four or five people stood with a sort of frightened hesitancy upon their faces. A man in evening dress was bending over the white figure of Josephine Dessars where she still lay upon the purple couch. He raised his head towards the others with a shocked look upon his face; his lips seemed trembling into the form of a word.

A tall fair-haired girl suddenly came on from the wings. Her cheeks were flushed and her eyes shone. She seemed about to speak, but stopped and stood looking towards the figure on the bed with nothing but surprise in her big eyes. One of the women left the whispering group and laid her hand upon her arm.

"My dear," she began. But Phyllis pushed her aside. She hurried towards the bed and leant over the small figure lying there. Then, very slowly, she drew back.

"Josephine—Josephine——," she said in a whisper that had a ringing quality which echoed for a long time in the brains of all who heard it.

But Josephine Dessars was dead.

ALDOUS HUXLEY

(1894–   )

ALDOUS LEONARD HUXLEY, the son of a distinguished man of letters and the grandson of the scientist, was educated at Eton and Balliol College, Oxford. At the age of twenty, he published *The Burning Wheel*. Among the later books which brought him success are *Leda* (1920), *Mortal Coils* (1922) and *Antic Hay* (1923).

"Cynthia," from *Limbo* (1920), is reprinted by kind permission of the author.

CYNTHIA

WHEN, some fifty years hence, my grandchildren ask me what I did when I was at Oxford in the remote days towards the beginning of our monstrous century, I shall look back across the widening gulf of time and tell them with perfect good faith that I never worked less than eight hours a day, that I took a keen interest in Social Service, and that coffee was the strongest stimulant in which I indulged. And they will very justly say—but I hope I shall be out of hearing. That is why I propose to write my memoirs as soon as possible, before I have had time to forget, so that having the truth before me I shall never in time to come be able, consciously or unconsciously, to tell lies about myself.

At present I have no time to write a complete account of that decisive period in my history. I must content myself therefore with describing a single incident of my undergraduate days. I have selected this one because it is curious and at the same time wholly characteristic of Oxford life before the War.

My friend Lykeham was an Exhibitioner at Swellfoot College. He combined blood (he was immensely proud of his Anglo-Saxon descent and the derivation of his name from Old English *lycam,* a corpse) with brains. His tastes were eccentric, his habits deplorable, the range of his information immense. As he is now dead, I will say no more about his character.

To proceed with my anecdote: I had gone one evening, as was my custom, to visit him in his rooms at Swellfoot. It was just after nine when I mounted the stairs, and great Tom was still tolling.

"In Thomæ laude
Resono bim bam sine fraude,"

as the charming imbecile motto used to run, and to-night he was living up to it by bim-bamming away in a persistent *basso profondo* that made an astonishing background of discord to the sound of frantic guitar playing which emanated from Lykeham's room. From the fury of his twanging I could tell that something more than usually cataclysmic had happened, for mercifully it was only in moments of the greatest stress that Lykeham touched his guitar.

I entered the room with my hands over my ears. "For God's sake——" I implored. Through the open window Tom was shouting a deep E flat, with a spread chord of under- and over-tones, while the guitar gibbered shrilly and hysterically in D natural. Lykeham laughed, banged down his guitar on to the sofa with such violence that it gave forth a trembling groan from all its strings, and ran forward to meet me. He slapped me on the shoulder with painful heartiness; his whole face radiated joy and excitement.

I can sympathise with people's pains, but not with their pleasures. There is something curiously boring about somebody else's happiness.

"You are perspiring," I said coldly.

Lykeham mopped himself, but went on grinning.

"Well, what is it this time?" I asked. "Are you engaged to be married again?"

Lykeham burst forth with the triumphant pleasure of one who has at last found an opportunity of disburdening himself of an oppressive secret. "Far better than that," he cried.

I groaned. "Some more than usually unpleasant amour, I suppose." I knew that he had been in London the day before, a pressing engagement with the dentist having furnished an excuse to stay the night.

"Don't be gross," said Lykeham, with a nervous laugh which showed that my suspicions had been only too well founded.

"Well, let's hear about the delectable Flossie or Effie or whatever her name was," I said, with resignation.

"I tell you she was a goddess."

"The goddess of reason, I suppose."

"A goddess," Lykeham continued; "the most wonderful creature I've ever seen. And the extraordinary thing is," he added confidentially, and with ill-suppressed pride, "that it seems I myself am a god of sorts."

"Of gardens; but do come down to facts."

"I'll tell you the whole story. It was like this: last night I was in town, you know, and went to see that capital play that's running at the Prince Consort's. It's one of those ingenious combinations of melodrama and problem play, which thrill you to the marrow and at the same time give you a virtuous feeling that you've been to see something serious. Well, I rolled in rather late, having secured an admirable place in the front row of the dress circle. I trampled in over the populace, and casually observed that there was a girl sitting next me, whom I apologised to for treading on her toes. I thought no more about her during the first act. In the interval, when the lights were on again, I turned round to look at things in general and discovered that there was a goddess sitting next me. One only had to look at her to see she was a goddess. She was quite incredibly beautiful—rather pale and virginal and slim, and at the same time very stately. I can't describe her; she was simply perfect—there's nothing more to be said."

"Perfect," I repeated, "but so were all the rest."

"Fool!" Lykeham answered impatiently. "All the rest were just damned women. This was a goddess, I tell you. Don't interrupt me any more. As I was looking with astonishment at her profile, she turned her head and looked squarely at me. I've never seen anything so lovely; I almost swooned away. Our eyes met——"

"What an awful novelist's expression!" I expostulated.

"I can't help it; there's no other word. Our eyes did meet, and we both fell simultaneously in love."

"Speak for yourself."

"I could see it in her eyes. Well, to go on. We looked at one another several times during that first interval, and then the second act began. In the course of the act, entirely accidentally, I knocked my programme on to the floor, and reaching down to get it I touched her hand. Well, there was obviously nothing else to do but to take hold of it."

"And what did she do?"

"Nothing. We sat like that the whole of the rest of the act, rapturously happy and——"

"And quietly perspiring palm to palm. I know exactly, so we can pass over that. Proceed."

"Of course you don't know in the least; you've never held a goddess's hand. When the lights went up again I reluctantly dropped her hand, not liking the thought of the profane crowd seeing us, and for want of anything better to say, I asked her if she actually was a goddess. She said it was a curious question, as she'd been wondering what god I was. So we said, how incredible: and I said I was sure she was a goddess, and she said she was certain I was a god, and I bought some chocolates, and the third act began. Now, it being a melodrama, there was of course in the third act a murder and burglary scene, in which all the lights were turned out. In this thrilling moment of total blackness I suddenly felt her kiss me on the cheek."

"I thought you said she was virginal."

"So she was—absolutely, frozenly virginal; but she was made of a sort of burning ice, if you understand me. She was virginally passionate—just the combination you'd expect to find in a goddess. I admit I was startled when she kissed me, but with infinite presence of mind I kissed her back, on the mouth. Then the murder was finished and the lights went on again. Nothing much more happened till the end of the show, when I helped her on with her coat and we went out together, as if it were the most obvious thing in the world, and got into a taxi. I told the man to drive somewhere where we could get supper, and he drove there."

"Not without embracements by the way?"

"No, not without certain embracements."

"Always passionately virginal?"

"Always virginally passionate."

"Proceed."

"Well, we had supper—a positively Olympian affair, nectar and ambrosia and stolen hand-pressures. She became more and more wonderful every moment. My God, you should have seen her eyes! The whole soul seemed to burn in their depths, like fire under the sea——"

"For narrative," I interrupted him, "the epic or heroic style is altogether more suitable than the lyrical."

"Well, as I say, we had supper, and after that my memory becomes a sort of burning mist."

"Let us make haste to draw the inevitable veil. What was her name?"

Lykeham confessed that he didn't know; as she was a goddess it didn't seem to matter what her earthly name was. How did he expect to find her again? He hadn't thought of that, but knew she'd turn up somehow. I told him he was a fool, and asked which particular goddess he thought she was and which particular god he himself.

"We discussed that," he said. "We first thought Ares and Aphrodite; but she wasn't my idea of Aphrodite, and I don't know that I'm very much like Ares."

He looked pensively in the old Venetian mirror which hung over the fireplace. It was a complacent look, for Lykeham was rather vain about his personal appearance, which was, indeed, repulsive at first sight, but had, when you looked again, a certain strange and fascinating ugly beauty. Bearded he would have made a passable Socrates. But Ares—no, certainly he wasn't Ares.

"Perhaps you're Hephæstus," I suggested; but the idea was received coldly.

Was he sure that she was a goddess? Mightn't she just have been a nymph of sorts? Europa, for instance. Lykeham repudiated the implied suggestion that he was a bull, nor would he hear of himself as a swan or a shower of gold. It was possible, however, he thought, that he was Apollo and she Daphne, reincarnated from her vegetable state. And though I laughed heartily at the idea of his being Phœbus Apollo, Lykeham stuck to the theory with increasing obstinacy. The more he thought of it the more it seemed to him probable that his nymph, with her burning cold virginal passion, was Daphne, while to doubt that he himself was Apollo seemed hardly to occur to him.

It was about a fortnight later, in June, towards the end of the term, that we discovered Lykeham's Olympian identity. We had gone, Lykeham and I, for an after-dinner walk. We set out through the pale tranquillity of twilight, and following the towpath up the river as far as Godstow, halted at the inn for a glass of port and a talk with the glorious old female Falstaff in black silk who kept it. We were royally entertained with gossip and old wine, and after Lykeham had sung a comic song which had reduced the old lady to a quivering jelly of hysterical laughter, we set out once more, intending to go yet a little farther up the river before we turned back. Darkness had fallen by this time; the stars were lighted in the sky; it was the sort of summer night to which Marlowe compared Helen of Troy. Over the meadows invisible peewits wheeled and uttered their melancholy cry; the far-off thunder of the weir bore a continuous even burden to all the other small noises of the night. Lykeham walked on in silence. We had covered perhaps a quarter of a mile when all at once my companion stopped and began looking fixedly westward towards Witham Hill. I paused too, and saw that he was staring at the thin crescent of the moon, which was preparing to set in the dark woods that crowned the eminence.

"What are you looking at?" I asked.

But Lykeham paid no attention, only muttered something to himself. Then suddenly he cried out, "It's she!" and started off at full gallop across the fields in the direction of the hill. Conceiving that he had gone suddenly mad, I followed. We crashed through the first hedge twenty yards apart. Then came the backwater; Lykeham leapt, flopped in three-quarters of the way across, and scrambled oozily ashore. I made a better jump and landed among the mud and rushes of the farther bank. Two more hedges and a ploughed field, a hedge, a road, a gate, another field, and then we were in Witham Wood itself. It was pitch black under the trees, and Lykeham had perforce to slacken his pace a little. I followed him by the noise he made crashing through the undergrowth and cursing when he hurt himself. That wood was a nightmare, but we got through it somehow and into the open glade at the top of the hill. Through the trees on the farther side of the clearing shone the moon, seeming incredibly close at hand. Then, suddenly, along the very path of the moonlight, the figure of a woman came walking through the trees into the open. Lykeham rushed towards her and flung himself at her feet and embraced her knees; she stooped down and smoothed his ruffled hair. I turned and walked away; it is not for a mere mortal to look on at the embracements of the gods.

As I walked back, I wondered who on earth—or rather who in heaven—Lykeham could be. For here was chaste Cynthia giving herself to him in the most unequivocal fashion. Could he be Endymion? No, the idea was too preposterous to be entertained for a moment. But I could think of no other loved by the virgin moon. Yet surely I seemed dimly to recollect that there had been some favoured god; for the life of me I could not remember who. All the way back along the river path I searched my mind for his name, and always it eluded me.

But on my return I looked up the matter in Lemprière, and almost died of laughing when I discovered the truth. I thought of Lykeham's Venetian mirror and his complacent side glances at his own image, and his belief that he was Apollo, and I laughed and laughed. And when, considerably after midnight, Lykeham got back to college, I met him in the porch and took him quietly by the sleeve, and in his ear I whispered "GOAT-FOOT," and then I roared with laughter once again.